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DUNGEON

A Dungeons & Dragons® Roleplaying Game Supplement

Wilderlands & Dragons

by Stephen Radney-MacFarland
Illustration by Howard Lyon

Much of the exploration in Dungeons & Dragons® occurs, unsurprisingly, in the dungeon, and for good reason. The game's not called "Wilderness & Dragons," after all. Dungeons are creepy. At least as important is that dungeons are closed systems. Sure, there is a way out of the dungeon, but it's usually also the way in. Because of this bottleneck, choices are easy to control in a dungeon. But eventually, your players are going to want to walk into more open systems. They are going to want their characters to explore the great outdoors, or, even more likely, you'll want to them to.

Flip through the *Dungeon Master's Book* or the *Rules Compendium*™ and you will find the basic building blocks for wilderness adventures. You'll find bits of terrain, some skill challenges, some overland movement speeds, and some information on weather. By the time you are finished gathering all these building blocks, you may be at a loss for how to put it together into a fun and interesting tromp through the wilderness.

The first thing to keep in mind when writing the framework for your wilderness adventure is that there are really important differences between running a dungeon adventure and a wilderness adventure. Dungeons, evil bastions, and ruined castles have hard corners, no long-distance lines of sight, and few potential allies. Every time characters open a door or

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move down a hallway, they are exploring new ground and taking risks.

A good wilderness adventure also features the thrill of discovery but in different ways from the dungeon. Rumors, scouting, guides, and maps all grant information and build anticipation toward what is across the next hill, but they can be faulty, their information out of date (sometimes by centuries), and the path is seldom "set in stone" the way a dungeon's corridors are—literally.

Dungeons can be grinders. The characters probably are glad to see the end of it, because they're so low on healing surges and daily powers that they don't know whether they can survive one more room. The wilderness has an element of grind, but it is fundamentally different. It's a grind of days and hours, not rooms and rounds. Health and provisions are the commodities of survival. Death in the dungeon is often sudden and violent. Death in the wilderness can be, too, but it can also be slow and agonizing, brought on by wrong turns, hunger, stalking predators, and the hazards of terrain and weather.

Molding those elements into a thrilling story can be difficult. This month, I'm going to provide some tools to help you make it happen—or at least an idea of how such tools can work. That should let you take your first step toward running anything between run-of-the-mill to truly dangerous wilderness encounters.

It's All about Planning and Provisions

Any Boy Scout will tell you that the trick to surviving in the wilderness is to be prepared. It's easy to be prepared for the wilderness in D&D. *Everlasting provisions*, a 4th level magic item, provides all the food and water you'll need, and that takes a lot of the worry out of an extended wilderness journey. The Travelers' Feast ritual will perform the same trick.

Being prepared, however, is about more than food and water. Provisions for a journey also include the raw material for getting out of jams, fixing equipment, and creating shelter.

This is the basic idea behind the survival day, a concept presented in the *Dark Sun Campaign Setting*. There's no reason why survival days shouldn't be adapted to other campaigns.

First, let's call one survival day a provision. A provision is whatever is needed to survive the rigors and hazards of one day in the wilderness. It can include many things, but always contains food and water.

For a standard D&D game, in the heroic tier, and set in a mix of mountain and forest terrain, one provision should cost 1 gp per day per member of the party. Be sure to include mounts, beast companions, and companion characters when counting party members, but familiars, spirit companions, and other entities that don't consume food can be ignored. That will come to 5 gp a day for most groups, or 10 gp if they're mounted. Depending on the type of terrain the heroes are traversing, the cost of one provision can be higher. In an inhospitable region such as the Elemental Chaos or the Abyss, the cost might go as high as 50 gp per day. The totality of what those provisions include is up to you, but remember that the point of provisions is to simplify record keeping for the players. If players need to track provisions plus a dozen other traveling commodities—bandages, fire starters, repair kits, animal snares, and so on—then the concept is drifting off the rails.

Each day, each living creature must consume one provision or they lose 1d6 – Con modifier healing surges (minimum loss of 1). Characters can choose not to consume provisions and take the healing surge loss instead.

Here's a potential snag you can introduce, if you want a twist. Because provisions account for a lot of material beyond food and water, they might be quite cumbersome, especially in a harsh environment. During winter, for example, generic provisions might include a warm but bulky tent, a small stove for melting ice into drinking water, and a lot of extra oil for the stove and lamps. This bulk can seriously impact the number of provisions that can be carried. Pack animals, or animal-drawn wagons or sledges, can help to deal with the weight and bulk, but wagons slow things down and animals need their own provisions. A *bag of holding* can make a great pantry. Alternatively, even simple food and water might be difficult to carry in regions where food spoils quickly. There's no reason to carry six days' worth of food if it's all going to be inedible after three days—which begs the question of what characters will eat and drink on days four, five, and six.

What about magic items, skills, and rituals that grant the characters food and water? I'm glad you asked. Basically, treat a day of food and water provided by foraging with the Nature skill to be a day of provisions. Instead of the static checks in that description, allow an easy check to find food for one person, a medium check to find food and water for five, and make it a hard check to find it for ten. The rules for magic items that provide provisions are simple. Treat them as provisions that must be consumed immediately. They can't be used to negate healing surge damage (we'll get to that shortly).

Using the Nature skill to forage for provisions involves giving your wilderness a level (to set the DCs for foraging), but you need to do that for the

Finding the Way skill challenge anyway. Which leads us to . . .

Finding the Way

The wilderness is a tricky place, and under the right (extreme) conditions, even a ranger can get lost. When traveling, the characters must succeed at the following skill challenge each day. It's OK for the party's ranger to lead the way, but be sure that other characters get involved in the skill challenge.

Finding the Way

Complexity: 1 (4 successes before 2 or 3 failures)

Primary Skills: Endurance (hard DC), Nature or the appropriate skill for the terrain (easy DC), or Perception (moderate DC).

Success: The characters successfully navigate the terrain.

Failure: With two failures, the characters become diverted. With three failures, the characters become lost.

Advantages: The following situations grant advantages to this skill challenge.

- ✦ Following a road grants two successes.
- ✦ Following a marked path or game trail grants one success.
- ✦ Possessing a good map of the area grants one success.
- ✦ Possessing good, timely information from local inhabitants grants one success.

Advantages can sometimes be nullified or even reversed by conditions. A snowstorm, flooded river, or landslide can cancel the benefits of roads, paths, and game trails. Bad maps or deceptive ones can negate or even reverse the advantage typically received by maps. Similarly, misinformation, confusing directions, or outright efforts to lead the characters astray can wipe out the benefit from almost any source.

Wilderness travel is rarely in a straight line. When characters succeed at the skill challenge, they can travel for a day along the best path, or close to the best path. If they fail, they are either diverted or lost. When a group of characters is diverted, they have an encounter and possibly a hazard. When a group of characters are lost, they lose an extra day (along with the appropriate number of provisions or healing surges) and there is a chance for two encounters and hazards (one of each on both the original day of travel and on the extra day).

Encounters and Hazards

Create one encounter for each day that the characters must spend in the wilderness. Regardless of whether they're searching for ruins, blazing a trail, or looking for a lost wizard, you should have a good idea of the minimum number of days they'll be out in the wilderness. Often, this is no more complex than dividing the distance they must travel by their expected average speed.

If the characters get diverted or lost, they might have more encounters. That makes it a good idea to have a few extra encounters in mind, just in case. But the odds are you won't need any extras, because the characters are likely to succeed on the daily skill challenges more often than they fail.

When you create these encounters, don't worry about the spit and polish you find in published encounters. These are more like drafts. A group of monsters, a terrain type, and some vague motivation or staging are all that's needed.

If you can, link these encounters loosely to the main story—for example, it's appropriate for characters to have encounters with giants while on their way to negotiate a treaty with the king of the giants. Sometimes a wolf attack is just a wolf attack, but a werewolf attack probably ought to be connected to a larger story. If an encounter creates the potential for characters to gain a bit more information or take an interesting detour, so much the better. You don't want to derail your main plot, so even detours ought to be productive.

The focus of many such encounters will be on combat, but that's not the only choice. It's not even the best choice under many circumstances. Most groups of characters will have no trouble surviving a single encounter in the course of a day of travel, unless it's uncharacteristically overpowering. Noncombat encounters can be with pilgrims, merchants, homesteaders, trappers, refugees, herders, tribal nomads, or other adventurers. Most such travelers have no interest in fighting everyone they meet randomly on the trail. They'll probably be cautious around strangers, especially in a points-of-light campaign, but that doesn't mean they can't become friendly. Nonplayer characters can be good sources of information about the region and what lies ahead. Feel free to throw in noncombat encounters even on days when the characters succeed on the skill challenge. Such encounters can also be used to soften the blow of hazards (reducing the amount of healing surge damage by up to three).

Potential allies straddle the space between hostile and neutral encounters. They might start hostile, but if the characters can perform a favor or win the NPCs' confidence, they might gain valuable allies. This can involve a simple skill challenge using

Diplomacy and Insight, but different encounters can have different triggers. Killing a leader might cause underlings to surrender, to flee, or to negotiate for safe passage. Captured, compliant, or coerced non-player characters can give the heroes all the bonuses of a civilized encounter.

You can also use triggered encounters. If you want something to happen on the third day of travel, just have it happen on the third day of travel, regardless of the outcome of the traveling skill challenge.

In the end, you should have a list like this, with some notes next to each of the encounters.

Day	Encounter
1	Encounter with local inhabitants
2	EL party level + 2
3	EL party level + 2
4	Potential allies
5	EL party level + 3; plus encounter with the marauding hill giants.
6	EL party level + 3
7	EL party level + 4
8	Potential Allies
9	EL party level + 3
10	EL party level + 4

When you make your encounter list, always feature encounters with ELs two to four higher than the party level. Frequently, these are the only encounters of the day, so they need to be challenging. If you want a more random approach, change the word "Day" at the top of the list to "Roll," and you have a random encounter table.

That takes care of encounters. What about hazards?

The hazards of the wilderness are naturally-occurring dangers, from floods to rock falls, from deadly plants to a bog crawling with disease.

The *Dungeon Master's Book* presents a few sample terrain hazards. The *Dark Sun® Creature Catalog* offers more that are characteristic of Athas. For your purposes here, however, hazards don't need to be written out in formal stat blocks; they can be very simple. For example, the following generic hazard might represent a crumbling bridge, a small rockslide, a forest fire, or a buffalo stampede.

- ✦ The hazard can be avoided with a successful Nature or Perception (or appropriate knowledge) group check at an easy, medium, or hard DC, depending on your assessment of the risk.
- ✦ Each character whose individual skill check failed loses one healing surge or takes damage equal to his or her healing surge value.
- ✦ If the group skill check failed, then the group as a whole loses 2d6 additional healing surges, divided between characters however the players choose. This is in addition to the healing surges lost because of individual skill checks.

Characters can negate healing surge losses by spending provisions on a one-for-one basis. You can also allow characters with daily powers that have the healing keyword to negate healing surges of damage on a one-for-one basis. A simpler alternative is to reduce healing surge damage by one, two, or three (your choice) for each leader in the group.

Healing surges lost in a hazard can't be recovered with a night's rest in the wilderness. They return only after the characters take an extended rest in a civilized area, such as a town or a comfortable, roadside inn.

Hazards have a lot of room for individual design. Hazards can be simple and generic, or each can be its own, unique skill challenge. Ultimately, the result is the same—lost healing surges—and that makes them very dangerous.

Piecing it All Together

Dungeons can be cleaned out and even used as bases of operation, but the longer one stays in the wilderness, the more the danger accumulates. Wilderness can be a deadly foe to the reckless and the unprepared. The tools described above will give you a robust, lightly structured way to represent wilderness hazards in your game while leaving plenty of leeway for you to tweak and supplement the system. It can be used easily on the fly. All you need is a book full of monsters, and I'm sure you have one of those.

The Mailbag

I'm saving up the best of this month's mail, because May is going to be a mailbag-only month. If you have a question that you're dying to ask, I have an answer for you. Please send it to the Save My Game group. Let's see what kind of great questions we can get for next month!

About the Author

Stephen Radney-MacFarland is a game designer living large in the Seattle area. He was a developer for D&D 4th Edition, a content developer for 3rd Edition organized play, and he has taught game design for the past three years. Stephen currently works at Paizo Publishing as a designer for the *Pathfinder* Roleplaying Game, writes "Save My Game," and works on the occasional D&D product. He also runs more games than his wife would prefer.

FORGOTTEN REALMS®

Ed Greenwood's Eye on the Realms

A Deadly Civic Honor

By Ed Greenwood ✦ Illustration by Wayne England

Over the long centuries of its existence, the bustling city of Waterdeep has given out a variety of civic and military awards, decorations, and honors. Formerly rare and awe-evoking, they have gradually dwindled in public regard to become marks of respect that are worn proudly at revels and ceremonies and ignored most of the rest of the time. The decline in the importance of these awards came about for several reasons: the passing of time, the shifting of attitudes away from patriotism and toward selfish moneymaking, and the frequency with which the awards were given.

However, nobles still see awards as marks of inherent (rather than inherited) superiority and as recognition of rightful character instilled through proper upbringing. Commoners take quiet pride in knowing someone of lowly birth who has one, taking it as proof that "we're just as good as the wealthy and mighty." Ambitious people with no noble blood who aspire to a title covet these awards most of all, because they see any recognition as a step to ennoblement and as a counter to any noble's claim that an award-winner is unworthy of nobility. ("Unworthiness" has been a traditional Waterdhavian argument against ennoblement.)

Disquiet has recently spread throughout the city, however, as word has gotten out that some awards, decorations, and honors are haunted by unknown entities that compel the wearers to undertake dangerous, often illegal tasks—the sorts of daring deeds performed by adventurers.

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For example, Beregon Stormshot of the Watch, holder of a Shield of the City, recently went on a very public—and totally uncharacteristic—slaying spree that ended only when he was dismembered by horrified fellow officers. A courtier who recovered Beregon's shield decoration immediately tried to kill the nearest city warriors, but stopped in a daze when the award was knocked out of his grasp in the struggle.

In another incident, an unnamed noble who had been awarded the Bright Sleeve took to covertly entering the palace and Castle Waterdeep by night to steal certain magic items. After a dozen or so successful thefts, the burglar was seen and chased; forcible removal of the award he was wearing caused a complete change in his behavior on the spot.

More recently, a guildmaster's wife was frightened out of her wits by what she saw, or thought she saw, one night in her bedchamber: Her husband grew an impossibly long arm with fanged jaws where his hand should be. She fled shrieking to a friend some doors away and left at daybreak but has not been seen since. When the friend reported the wife's recounting of the event to the Watch, and they confronted the guildmaster, he fled from them, up a sheer wall no human should be able to climb in such haste. Until that moment, the guildmaster had been known only as a kindly, generous man who helped all in need and gently suggested and sponsored improvements in city services. In fact, earlier that day he had received the Valorstar in a ceremony honoring his efforts.

Other, darker stories are now being whispered across tavern tables and behind closed doors all over the city. Are some city awards haunted? Cursed? Or is something else afoot?

The Awards of a Grateful Waterdeep

The majority of awards given by the Open Lord of Waterdeep to citizens are simple prizes for proper conduct or the performance of a deed that represents Waterdeep well (such as quelling a riot, quieting a feud, or treating a visiting envoy in a way that left the visitor pleased or less troubled). They consist of a cash award in "bright new coin of the city," a citation (a scroll naming the award winner and flatteringly describing what he or she did to win), and a ring of little value that is inscribed with the winner's name and that bears the arms of the city of Waterdeep.

Other special awards are bestowed less frequently, and each has its own name. If an award is military in nature, such as the Bright Sleeve and the Shield of the City, it is known as a "decoration," and if it is more service-oriented, such as the Valorstar, it is called an "honor."

Disquiet has recently spread throughout the city, however, as word has gotten out that some awards, decorations, and honors are haunted by unknown entities that compel the wearers to undertake dangerous, often illegal tasks—the sorts of daring deeds performed by adventurers.

The Bright Sleeve

This decoration is literally a sleeve of cloth-of-gold, embroidered with the name of the person to whom it is awarded. The Bright Sleeve is fitted with elaborately worked pins to secure it at wrist and shoulder. The pins resemble serpentine bows of knotted laurel leaves. It fits a human arm from the wrist to its "flame," which stands up from the wearer's shoulder like a stiff collar. The sleeve's open end flares outward like the tabards of some heralds, and it has a pleated, accordionlike section at the elbow that allows it to be shortened (without actual alteration) for wear on shorter arms.

The Bright Sleeve is awarded to outlanders, citizens, and employees of the city (Guard, Watch, courtiers, and hirelings) for acts of bravery above and beyond expected conduct or paid duties. An example of award-winning conduct is rescuing someone at the risk of one's own life.

The Shield of the City

This decoration takes the form of a large golden shield-shaped chest badge (pin), backed by everbright battle steel; some wearers have found it to be effective breast armor. It is awarded for outstanding acts of military service contributing to the protection of Waterdeep and its inhabitants, and so members of the Watch (or, in earlier times, both Guard and Watch) usually receive it. However, in a few cases, a noble who jumps in to fight alongside city defenders earns one.

Some shields have been awarded to those who capture dangerous escaped fugitives or known murderers, or who spot or help prevent someone poisoning food or water or drink in the city. In the past, those who have learned of and reported an attack on Waterdeep in time for city defenders to make ready to repel it have also earned a shield.

The Valorstar

This adamantine pin is strikingly beautiful, set with a single large cabochon-cut (smooth ovoid) thumb-sized sapphire.

The Valorstar is awarded for long and meritorious service to the city, such as many acts of tending the sick without pay, or giving shelter or aid to the homeless, the destitute, or visitors. It is occasionally given out for a single act of outstanding service, such as contributing funds to the repair, expansion, or erection of a needed building such as a hospital. (In the Realms, as in our own world during medieval times, a "hospital" is a home for the poor, not a medical facility.)

This is a secular award; the holy work of clergy is never recognized by bestowal of this honor, since it's expected that a faith will confer its own mark of thanks and esteem.

What's Going On

Watch and palace officials can't agree on what's causing the troubles with the awards, and they are arguing over many theories, from fell ancient curses to stray magic to madness caused by diseases carried by the physical awards.

According to Elminster, the truths—plural, because several causes are at work—are more sinister.

A powerful undead creature that has been linked to his Shield of the City decoration affected Beregon Stormshot, and this creature can overwhelm and control a bearer. The thieving noble was the coerced agent of an evil sorcerer who used the noble's Bright Sleeve decoration as a magical conduit, from afar, to compel and communicate with the award-wearer to make the person into an unwilling accomplice. The unfortunate guildmaster received not a Valorstar, but a shapeshifting monster posing as that decoration, who murdered and then impersonated the guildmaster, then killed the man's wife upon realizing she had discovered its secret. After escaping the Watch, the monster took a new shape and is probably hiding in plain view in Waterdeep—just one more person among the throngs.

Defender of Rightful Rule

Beregon Stormshot is far from being the first victim of an exalted brain in a jar (see *Open Grave: Secrets of the Undead*), but such beings are rare indeed in Waterdeep. Recent repairs to Castle Waterdeep uncovered this brain, spurring it to action. It belongs to Ostryn Gralhund, an early noble of Waterdeep. This accomplished mage believed the guilds and the rise of the "selfish, uncaring, unthinking lout of a commoner" would doom his city to endless feuds, strife, and ultimately collapse. As it happened, Gralhund helped prepare many early Shield of the City decorations and hid within them enchanted clippings of his own fingernails, which would serve as foci for his spells (and in undeath, his mental attacks).

Gralhund enlisted the aid of his apprentices to help him live on when his elderly body began to fail him, faking his own death and deceiving his family as to his fate (drowned at sea in his pleasure caravel). In undeath, installed and hidden in Castle Waterdeep, he compelled or influenced Watch and Guard officers to work against guilds and to maintain the "wise and enlightened rule" of the nobility. Later castle renovations left his reach feeble, so Gralhund seized boldly on Stormshot's mind to strike down as many guildmasters and prosperous commoners as possible, before inevitably losing "this vessel" (and leaping to the mind of the next one, to continue his work). He lurks somewhere in the castle walls yet.

Mind in a Noose

Unknown to Lord Mortrym Margaster of Waterdeep, his sister Glaraura has mastered the heights of sorcery. For decades, she dwelt in Athkatla, very capably managing the considerable Margaster mercantile and investment interests there. Recently, though, she devised a variant of the *mind tide* spell (see *Arcane Power*). Glaraura's *mind noose* spell is identical in all respects to *mind tide*, except that it is vested in an item. She can use it from afar on anyone wearing or carrying the item—but no one else, no matter how near—and the magic ends the instant contact with the item is lost.

Always afraid that her use of sorcery would be publicly revealed and she would be attacked or cast

out of high regard as a result, Lady Glaraura Margaster has increasingly sought to acquire magic items with which to defend herself, amassing a magical armory for the inevitable day of reckoning when all would turn on her. Minor items could be bought, or seized and brought to her by hired adventuring bands, but prized items she recalled from visits to the Palace of Waterdeep and Castle Waterdeep could be stolen only by a noble, not seized by invading outlanders.

Lord Mortrym, known for his brave defense of the lone or outnumbered who find themselves caught in the alleys by gangs at night in the rougher wards of Waterdeep, recently became his sister's pawn after one of her rare visits home for the funeral of their elderly mother (when Glaraura added *a mind noose* effect to her brother's Bright Sleeve decoration).

The Not-So-Secret Reign of the Faceless

For generations, Waterdhavians have heard frightening tales of doppelgangers in their midst. Some claim that "faceless" shapeshifters rule the city, having replaced entire noble families, many courtiers and Lords of Waterdeep and guildmasters, and the upper ranks of the City Watch. Many swindles—even lasting identity thefts—have been carried out by careful, cunning doppelgangers. Perhaps they even rule cities and kingdoms everywhere, hiding among humans as their true masters.

These tales are wildly overblown; doppelgangers have numbered few when compared to humans, and most are content to live ordinary, low-profile lives. Those who crave power war viciously with each other. Doppelgangers slay and impersonate lords, then kill rival doppelgangers that have done the same. The spying spells that are cast on many powerful people unmask more than a few doppelgangers, forcing them to flee the personas they've stolen and give up all the power they've thus gained. In many cities, Waterdeep included, wizards and the authorities have hunted down and eliminated the Unseen and other doppelganger groups. So the faceless shapeshifters do not rule the world or even Waterdeep, and never have.

Yet at least one ambitious individual doppelganger always seems ready to slay and impersonate someone wealthier and more powerful (such as a guildmaster) because it sees this method as a swift and tempting road to success. (And, Elminster fears, this attractive road always will draw doppelgangers.)

About the Author

Ed Greenwood is the man who unleashed the Forgotten Realms® setting on an unsuspecting world. He works in libraries, plus he writes fantasy, science fiction, horror, mystery, and even romance stories (sometimes all in the same novel), but he is still happiest when churning out Realmslore, Realmslore, and more Realmslore. He still has a few rooms in his house in which he has space left to pile up papers . . .

DARK·SUN
CAMPAIGN SETTING

Eye on Dark Sun

The Accursed Legion

By Rodney Thompson
Illustration by Daarken

Many years before the death of Kalak, a small band of escaped slaves, free people, and members of the Veiled Alliance staged an attack on the sorcerer-king Tectuktitlay, hoping to overthrow the ruler of Draj and bring an end to his tyranny. Unlike the heroes who slew the despot of Tyr, however, these warriors did not have the aid of a powerful artifact, and they suffered the consequences of being unprepared.

The attempt on Tectuktitlay began with a staged uprising in Draj. Few remember this event, though riots raged through the city-state for days leading up to the attack on the sorcerer-king. After the uprising was quelled, Tectuktitlay's templars scoured the city-state for anyone who either participated or witnessed this rebellion, and had those people permanently

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silenced. During the second day of the uprising, three dozen rebels penetrated the Father and Master Temple and made their way to Tectuktitlay's throne room, where he had been holding court. Members of the Veiled Alliance in the raiding party negated the Black Guard constructs for a short period of time, while a clan of jasuan knights held off the moon priests in the temple, leaving the invaders to face Tectuktitlay alone.

What transpired in that throne room would make any of Draj's citizens believe that the sorcerer-king truly is a god. Tectuktitlay's power devastated the invading force, but instead of slaying them outright, the sorcerer-king chose to torment them by placing upon them a terrible curse: They must wander the deserts of Athas forever, never finding shelter and never entering civilization again. The curse he placed upon the invaders, which eventually gained the name Accursed Legion, ensured that if any of them are killed, they would rise again days afterward to rejoin the legion. To guarantee that the legion never enters the city-states, he sent a monstrous creature of his own artifice, known as the Grim Lasher, to put the whip to them whenever they get too close to civilization or when they rest in place for too long.

Over the centuries, the sight of the Grim Lasher driving the desperate and bedraggled Accursed Legion across the sands has become something of a legend among dune traders. Many traveling merchants see the spectacle at least once in their lives, and these people spread the tale far and wide during their travels. As veteran dune traders and wasteland nomads tell anyone who will listen, despite the group's noble origins, the Accursed Legion is dangerous. When one hears the thundering sound of their crodlus approaching, or sees the cloud of sand on the horizon, that means that the legion is near, and one should move away with haste. The legionnaires might once have had the best of intentions, but years of banishment in the desert have left them desperate for release from their curse, and they do what they can to break it. Some who have observed them believe that they have lost all sense of who they once were, abandoning their identities, their memories, and most of all their moral compasses—the Accursed Legion now attacks anything that crosses its path to vent its frustration at its own plight. If the ranks of the Accursed Legion have been thinned by losses, then those slain by the legion might rise from the dead the following day to join their killers in eternal banishment.

Despite the tales of the traders, some believe that the Accursed Legion can be saved. Members of the Veiled Alliance have carried on the work of prior generations by searching for a way to break the curse that Tectuktitlay has placed upon the legion. Some believe that the legion holds the keys to overthrowing not only Tectuktitlay, but also other sorcerer-kings; if freed from their curse, they can share knowledge that they possessed at the time of their failed assault. Others maintain that their deathless state indicates that Tectuktitlay has mastery over some form of shadow magic, drawn from the Gray to make the legion deathless, and that only when the curse is lifted will Tectuktitlay be vulnerable to defeat.

Warriors of the Accursed Legion

The warriors of the Accursed Legion once had names, identities, and histories. Now they are all in the same state of desperation, and their all-consuming curse has replaced much of what once made them unique.

Lore

Arcana DC 29: The Accursed Legion is a desert legend that happens to be true. The legion consists of cursed warriors who roam the desert on crodlus, forever driven away from civilization by their curse. They are dangerous not only for their desperation, but

Accursed Legion Warrior Medium natural humanoid	**Level 13 Brute** XP 800
HP 162; **Bloodied** 81	**Initiative** +9
AC 25, **Fortitude** 25, **Reflex** 24, **Will** 22	**Perception** +7
Speed 6	
Traits	
Curse of Resurrection	
When the warrior dies, it rises from the dead 24 hours later with full hit points alongside the rest of the legion.	
Recruiting for the Legion	
Any living humanoid slain by the warrior has a 50 percent chance of rising 24 hours later as an Accursed Legion warrior alongside the rest of the legion.	
Tectuktitlay's Decree	
The warrior cannot attack Tectuktitlay, his templars, or the Grim Lasher.	
Standard Actions	
⊕ **Axe** (weapon) ✦ **At-Will**	
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +18 vs. AC	
Hit: 2d10 + 10 damage, and the warrior pushes the target up to 3 squares, then shifts up to 3 squares to a square adjacent to the target.	
⸸ **Driven Before the Legion** (weapon) ✦ **Recharge** when first bloodied	
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +18 vs. AC	
Hit: 4d10 + 10 damage. The warrior pushes the target up to 3 squares and knocks it prone, then shifts up to 3 squares to a square adjacent to the target.	
Str 17 (+9) **Dex** 16 (+9) **Wis** 13 (+7)	
Con 22 (+12) **Int** 10 (+6) **Cha** 11 (+6)	
Alignment unaligned **Languages** Common	
Equipment bone axe, tattered clothes	

ADVENTURE HOOKS

Here are some suggestions for ways you can integrate the Accursed Legion into your Dark Sun® campaign.

Veiled Alliance Secrets: When the Accursed Legion was banished to the desert, so too were some of the secrets that the Veiled Alliance had worked diligently to uncover—including the secrets behind Tectuktitlay's Black Guard. Now, the only hope of recovering those secrets is to track down the Accursed Legion and find a way to break the curse laid upon them, at least long enough to get the truth out of legion members that were once of the Veiled Alliance.

Marshaling an Army: Taking on a sorcerer-king is no easy task. A band of heroes might be willing to stand against a tyrant, but a true rebellion needs soldiers to overthrow templars, and most citizens of the city-states are too cowed to be of much use. A group of heroes that frees the Accursed Legion from their curse, however, could find that the warriors of the legion are quickly restored to their former selves, and an assault on a sorcerer-king is just the thing to slake their thirst for revenge.

Unwilling Raiders: En route to a House Tsalaxa fortress and warehouse, the heroes spot the signs of the Accursed Legion on the horizon. The Grim Lasher is driving the legion toward the outpost, and only days remain to prepare for the inevitable clash between the fortress guardians and the Accursed Legion. The representatives of House Tsalaxa at the fortress offer the heroes a sorcerer-king's ransom if they stay and help repel the legion—but the prospects of survival look grim.

Accursed Legion Crodlu Level 13 Minion Skirmisher
Large natural beast (mount, reptile) XP 200

HP 1; a missed attack never damages a minion. **Initiative** +12
AC 27, **Fortitude** 26, **Reflex** 25, **Will** 23 **Perception** +8
Speed 8

Traits

Curse of Resurrection
When the crodlu dies, it rises from the dead 24 hours later with full hit points alongside the rest of the legion.

Steed of the Accursed Legion (mount)
When mounted by a friendly rider of 13th level or higher, the crodlu cannot be the target of any attack.

Accursed Step (fire, zone)
Any time the crodlu leaves squares for any reason, those squares become a zone that lasts until the end of the crodlu's next turn. Any enemy that ends its turn in the zone takes 10 fire damage.

Standard Actions

Beak ✦ At-Will
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +18 vs. AC
Hit: 11 damage, or 15 if the crodlu has combat advantage against the target.

Claw ✦ At-Will
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +18 vs. AC
Hit: 11 damage.
Effect: The crodlu can shift 1 square.

Str 22 (+12)	**Dex** 18 (+10)	**Wis** 15 (+8)
Con 18 (+10)	**Int** 3 (+2)	**Cha** 8 (+5)

Alignment unaligned **Languages** –

also because when the legion kills a creature, it rises to join the legion.

Encounters

A person sees the Accursed Legion only once in a lifetime in most cases, so a direct encounter with the legion is a rare thing indeed. Most encounters with the legion involve only warriors and their crodlus, who have been twisted by Tectuktitlay's magic to leave trails of flame in their wake. However, some unlucky souls come across the legion at a time when the Grim Lasher is at their backs. Otherwise, the Accursed Legion is rarely encountered with other intelligent creatures.

The Grim Lasher

The Grim Lasher is a horrific monster created by Tectuktitlay to drive the Accursed Legion from one side of the burning desert to the other, never allowing the legionnaires to interact with civilization. The creature resembles a giant like those that live in the Sea of Silt, towering over the members of the legion and casting a long shadow. A hooded cloak flows behind it, and the cowl shadows a skeletal face. The creature wears a simple harness and loincloth for protection. The Grim Lasher carries a long whip made of thin flames, which it uses to punish the members of the legion that do not flee before it.

The Grim Lasher was created long before the banishment of the Accursed Legion, but Tectuktitlay had had little opportunity to use it before that event. The sorcerer-king used a captive giant as the subject of a horrific experiment that led to the Grim Lasher's creation. Tectuktitlay slew the giant, then used a spirit that he had bound with defiling magic to reanimate the body, trapping the twisted spirit inside with strands of shadow power drawn from the Gray. The end result is an undead monstrosity animated by a corrupted spirit that Tectuktitlay trapped by using dark magic that only a few know how to manipulate.

The Grim Lasher has only one true purpose: to drive the Accursed Legion before it and to never let the legion enter a city-state. However, what few people know is that Tectuktitlay can still send new orders to

the Grim Lasher from afar, bending the creature and the path of the legion to his will. The sorcerer-king has had little reason to do so over the years, but the legion has been used to ambush the enemies of Draj at the command of Tectuktitlay from time to time.

What no one—not even Tectuktitlay—knows is that the spirit that animates the Grim Lasher has spent its imprisonment struggling against the bonds that bind it to the sorcerer-king's will. Though it has yet to break free on its own, anyone who could dispel the power drawn from the Gray that binds the spirit to the Grim Lasher's body could not only free the spirit within it, but also break the curse that chains the Accursed Legion.

Lore

Arcana DC 30: The Grim Lasher is an undead creature that drives the Accursed Legion before it. The creature was created by, and is still under the control of, Tectuktitlay. The creature is an abomination of undeath that appears from time to time near the Accursed Legion, always driving the group away from civilization and across the desert wastes. Slaying the Grim Lasher is not easy, even for powerful creatures. Only those who know the true name of the giant whose body was used to create the Grim Lasher can ever truly defeat it; by uttering its name, a hero can make the Grim Lasher lose its ability to teleport to a safe location when in peril, forcing it to face down the hero or be defeated.

Streetwise DC 22: Mothers tell their children stories of the Grim Lasher to frighten them, and superstitious citizens refuse to travel outside the walls of Draj on certain days of the year, believing that the Grim Lasher is waiting to enslave them for all eternity. Despite the prevalence of these stories and superstitions, little truth is found within them. Truthful or not, however, citizens won't be budged from their safe havens on days in which they fear the coming of the Grim Lasher.

The Grim Lasher **Level 15 Solo Controller**
Large elemental humanoid (undead) XP 6,000
HP 584; **Bloodied** 292 **Initiative** +12
AC 29, **Fortitude** 28, **Reflex** 27, **Will** 26 **Perception** +17
Speed 8 Blindsight 10
Immune disease, poison; **Resist** 10 necrotic; **Vulnerable** 10 radiant
Saving Throws +5; **Action Points** 2

Traits

Impel the Accursed Legion
On an initiative of 10 + the Grim Lasher's initiative, one Accursed Legion warrior of the Grim Lasher's choice must use a free action to charge or make a basic attack against a creature the Grim Lasher chooses.

Force of Unmatched Power (psychic)
Whenever the Grim Lasher is dominated or stunned by an attack, it is instead dazed until the end of its next turn, and the attacker takes 15 psychic damage.

Standard Actions

Burning Whip (fire, weapon) ✦ **At-Will**
Attack: Melee 3 (one creature); +20 vs. AC
Hit: 4d4 + 4 damage, and 2d8 fire damage.
Effect: The Grim Lasher slides the target up to 2 squares.

Whip Storm (fire, weapon) ✦ **Recharge** ⚄ ⚅
Attack: Melee 3 (one, two, or three creatures); +20 vs. AC
Hit: 4d4 + 7 damage, and 2d8 fire damage.
Effect: The Grim Lasher slides each target up to 2 squares.

Minor Actions

Grim Lasher's Command (charm, psychic) ✦ **At-Will**
Attack: Ranged 10 (one creature); +18 vs. Will
Hit: 3d8 + 5 psychic damage, and the target must use a free action to move as close to the Grim Lasher as the target's speed allows, avoiding hindering terrain.

String Them Up (fire, weapon) ✦ **Recharge** when first bloodied
Attack: Melee 3 (one creature); +20 vs. AC
Hit: 4d4 + 4 damage, and 3d8 fire damage.
Miss: Half damage.
Effect: The Grim Lasher lifts the target up to 2 squares into the air, and the target is restrained there (save ends). Until this effect ends, each time the Grim Lasher is hit by an attack, the target takes 4d8 fire damage.

Triggered Actions

Retreat (teleportation) ✦ **Encounter**
Trigger: The Grim Lasher is first bloodied.
Effect (Free Action): The Grim Lasher teleports to a location of its choosing that it has visited in the last 24 hours. The location doesn't need to be in line of sight.

Str 24 (+14)	**Dex** 20 (+12)	**Wis** 21 (+12)
Con 18 (+11)	**Int** 13 (+8)	**Cha** 16 (+10)

Alignment evil **Languages** Common
Equipment whip

Encounters

Those who have encountered the Grim Lasher do so when it is driving the Accursed Legion before it. However, the Grim Lasher does not accompany the legion at all times, leaving those who have come across the legion absent the Grim Lasher to wonder where the legion's taskmaster is. Conceivably, one could encounter the Grim Lasher away from the legion, but none who have done so have lived to tell the tale.

About the Author

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HEROIC
1–10

CHAOS SCAR™

Scarblade

A Chaos Scar adventure for characters of 7th to 9th level

By Sterling Hershey

Illustration by Lorraine Schleter ♦ Cartography by Mike Schley

"Scarblade" is an adventure for characters of 7th to 9th level. It takes place in the Chaos Scar or in any densely forested area in your campaign setting.

In the adventure, characters discover the Proving Pit, a gladiatorial arena that is associated with an enticing magical sword called the Scarblade. The Proving Pit and the Scarblade are both self-aware to a limited extent. Though they share a location and methodology, they want separate things. Adventurers are drawn to the pit by fantastic tales or psychic lures. Once there, they must battle local denizens and the pit's champion, the ghost of Morrn Bladeclaw. If they are victorious, the characters can escape with the Scarblade as their reward.

For a map of the Chaos Scar along with further details, read the Chaos Scar introduction online at http://www.wizards.com/dnd/Article.aspx?x=dnd/duad/chaosscar.

Getting the Characters Involved

At some point during one of their explorations into the Chaos Scar, or while discussing the lore of the Chaos Scar at Restwell Keep or at the Crossroads trading post, the adventurers learn of the dreaded and violent Proving Pit. It should be a fairly well-known legend, although concrete, reliable information will be hard to come by.

Select one or more of the following adventure hooks and adapt it to your campaign.

- ♦ The adventurers hear local tales of the Scarblade from bards, discover the long-lost diary of a dead adventurer, or stumble onto the information through their own research or scrying. Provide them with a general description of the sword and the Proving Pit. The source might also relate some of Morrn Bladeclaw's history.

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- The Scarblade wants to escape from the pit, and it sometimes calls out psychically to an adventurer it believes is capable of freeing it and wielding it, even if only temporarily.
- The Proving Pit psychically calls to one or more of the most powerful characters, making promises of power and glory for those who are victorious. Characters might experience visions of themselves defeating their companions, or of using the mighty Scarblade to defeat their longtime foes.
- The adventurers enter the valley of the Proving Pit, either intentionally or because it happens to be in their path, and find it difficult to escape. Once there, they encounter the Scarblade.
- The adventurers become embroiled in a dispute with a local inhabitant who demands that they go to the Proving Pit to resolve the situation. This individual will almost certainly withhold some details about the pit, or will himself be misinformed about its real nature.

Rumors

Any of the following elements can be seeded into rumors for the purpose of drawing the characters toward the Proving Pit. Note that not all of this information is accurate.

- Morrn Bladeclaw was a barbarian warrior known for his cruelty and ambition. He steadily rose in status in his clan until he claimed the right to become its champion by defeating the wielder of a powerful artifact known as Scarblade. One of Morrn's tribal enemies eventually killed him but was unable to wrest Scarblade from the dead man's hands. Now the corpse of Morrn Bladeclaw fights anyone who will face him, with Scarblade as the prize for the victor.
- The Proving Pit is used by the denizens of the Chaos Scar to settle disputes between themselves or to test themselves against other fighters of many kinds. A splinter of the meteorite that created the Chaos Scar lies hundreds of feet below the surface of the pit, giving the place itself a malevolent cunning.
- No one who enters the pit has ever managed to leave it; either they die facing Morrn Bladeclaw, or they kill him, take Scarblade, and instantly assume Morrn's curse. In fact, dozens of warriors have held the blade over the years, but none have carried it out of the Proving Pit.
- Morrn Bladeclaw came to the Proving Pit intending to win Scarblade, and he did. Now, the blade makes him invincible and immortal. He could leave anytime he wanted to, but he enjoys the killing too much.
- After capturing Scarblade from a frost giant, Morrn was assassinated by a wizard of great power who sought the mighty weapon. With his final breath, Morrn Bladeclaw cursed the wizard to forever fight anyone who came to claim the blade.
- The Scarblade is encased in a translucent crystal spire above a gladiatorial pit. Anyone who defeats the pit's champion can claim it.

Background

The Proving Pit is used by the denizens of the Chaos Scar to settle disputes and to test themselves against the finest fighters in the area. A small shard of the meteorite that created the Chaos Scar lies hundreds of feet below the pit, imparting a mysterious power and personality to the location. Combatants are drawn to the area by a powerful urge to achieve victory through combat. Most combatants do not realize they are being impelled by an outside force.

Morrn Bladeclaw was a barbarian known for his cruelty and ambition. His clan roamed the Nentir Vale region long before the formation of the Chaos Scar. Morrn advanced steadily in status among his clan. He claimed the right to become the clan's champion and to wield the powerful Scarblade by defeating its previous owner. Driven by dreams of power, Morrn sought to prove himself worthy of the rank of chief.

Lured onward by a vague call to battle, Morrn was drawn to the pit. There he honed his skill, always with the intent of returning to his home as the greatest champion of all. Morrn soon dominated all contenders at the pit, but in turn, he was dominated by the shard's presence. The longer he stayed, the less he cared about leaving and the more he became part of the place. His thoughts of clan leadership drained away. Morrn's goal of becoming the greatest champion of all was realized, but not as he had planned. He was a slave of the Proving Pit, with no thoughts of returning to his tribe.

The pit, however, has no use for eternal champions. Morrn was mortally wounded by a wizard of great power who coveted the Scarblade. The wizard was cut down by Morrn's dying blow, and both perished on the bloodstained floor of the Proving Pit. Under the influence of the pit, bystanders buried Morrn below the arena's central dais. The Scarblade was encased in translucent crystal and embedded along the pit's north wall, where it can be seen by all who fight and die in the pit.

Morrn's ghost haunts the area. Though he cannot use his sword, he longs for the feel of it in his grasp and still thrills to the roar of the crowd when an opponent crumples to the dirt.

Psychic Connections

Both the Proving Pit and the Scarblade call out to characters in the hope of luring them to the arena. Despite their seeming similarities, they are not a team. The sword and the pit have different methods and different goals. In fact, the conflict between the two is a principal element in the adventure, so it is important to understand what they want and how they go about pursuing their aims.

You are the best judge of how these psychic communications should be handled. In groups with a strong storytelling focus, all of this can be completely open, so that everyone can enjoy the unfolding character conflicts while trusting that players will not act on information that their characters don't have. In groups that enjoy mysteries, intrigue, and some internal conflict, you could handle the psychic overtures of the pit and the sword by passing secret notes to chosen players; everyone at the table will know that something is up, but only a few will have an inkling of what it is. In groups that focus on combat, it might be best to let everyone know that something or someone is trying to influence their thoughts. When they're good and mad about that, then turn them loose against the pit and Morrn Bladeclaw.

The Proving Pit: The pit seeks to draw intelligent creatures to itself and to trap them in a cycle of violence, combat, and killing. Psychic calls from the Proving Pit manifest themselves as strong emotions and instinctive urges. They build upon a character's natural desire for victory, glory, and combat.

Because it is animated by the buried chaos shard, the pit has a degree of influence over the surrounding terrain. Once characters move into the range of the pit's influence, they find that the way forward is much easier than the way back. Their dreams, daydreams, and stray thoughts are pervaded with visions of themselves as great victors in a competitive arena. These visions are innocuous, at least at first; the arena is glorious, the competitions fair and nonlethal. When the pit finds a receptive mind, however, these images change quickly to become more violent and bloody.

The range of the pit's psychic effect is up to you; a radius of a half-mile to two miles is recommended. There's no reason why a particularly susceptible character could not feel the pit's lure from Restwell Keep, Fallcrest, or even farther away, if that serves your storytelling style.

The Scarblade: The sword has no connection to the chaos shard. It is a magic weapon that predates the Empire of Nerath. Its range for making contact with characters is about five miles. The sword specifically targets characters who can wield it with some mastery, and it ignores all others. It speaks to a character while that person is resting or calm, and it appeals directly to his or her martial spirit.

The blade wants to be released from its crystal prison and once again used in mortal combat by a brave warrior. It's not an overtly evil weapon, but it shares the barbarians' love for battle and sees nothing wrong with killing in pursuit of glory. It no longer has any particular attachment to Morrn Bladeclaw.

The Scarblade will help a character who is fighting in the Proving Pit, if it considers that character to be a promising candidate to become the sword's new owner. When one of the character's attacks misses by just 1 or 2, whisper to the player, "I can help." Let the player know this is the same entity that contacted him or her earlier. If the character assents to being helped, then give the character a +2 bonus on the attack roll that just missed, turning that miss into a hit. Then have the character make a saving throw. If it succeeds, the Scarblade will repeat the offer the next time the character's attack misses by 1 or 2. If the saving throw fails, the Scarblade won't repeat the offer to that character.

Telling Them Apart: At first, psychic contact by the sword and the pit will be easily confused, because both want to lure heroes to the Proving Pit. The clues that can help characters realize they're dealing with two different entities are:

- The Proving Pit appeals to emotions such as anger, hate, and arrogance, while the Scarblade appeals to pride and ambition.
- The pit creates a vision of armed competition that starts out clean but soon becomes vicious and bloody in a way that thrills the viewer. The Scarblade creates a vision of personal triumph occurring largely on the field of battle rather than in a competitive arena.
- The pit's visions show the viewer as a more powerful, idealized, yet subtly debased version of the character. The Scarblade's visions also show the character as powerful and idealized, but always as armed with an unfamiliar sword.

TREASURE PARCELS

Parcel 1: Magic Item, level 9 (on the body of a victim of the pit)
Parcel 2: Three 500 gp gems + 200 gp (on corpses and packs scattered throughout the Proving Pit)
Parcel 3: Scarblade, a level 10 magic item (encased in crystal in the Proving Pit)

Through the Rugged Forest

The Proving Pit lies in a secluded valley that is surrounded by low, steep hills. Only a few lightly used trails wind through the rugged woods, hills, and ravines. The adventurers might learn of these trails from a map or from residents of the region, they might cross one of them by chance, or they might be led to one by the pit or the sword.

Through its connection to the chaos shard, the pit manipulates nearby terrain to make it as difficult as possible for anyone to leave the valley. The surrounding hillsides are sprinkled with the remains of those who tried and failed. Nothing of value remains on any of the corpses, but at your discretion, characters might find a letter or diary or some other indication of what lies ahead.

The pit's efforts to herd the characters to the valley floor are subtle. As long as characters are moving generally downhill and toward the pit, they don't meet any significant obstacles to their progress. Should they turn back the way they came or begin moving uphill, the pit begins unleashing hazards in their path. It is possible that the characters will descend directly to the bottom and not trigger any hazards at this time. If they try to leave without defeating the pit, the hazards will be waiting for them.

Four sample hazards are included below. These can be encountered as you see fit, and you can add other terrain obstacles of your own. The encounter map shows one possible arrangement of hazards and corpses along a particularly dangerous section of trail. Rearrange them as needed to fit the situation.

Bear in mind that the purpose of the hazards is not to kill or injure the characters. Careful and clever players can find ways to avoid or overcome any static obstacle. The real purpose of the terrain hazards is to arouse the characters' suspicion and curiosity about this place. When they get the idea that the land itself is trying to prevent them from leaving, they're bound to wonder why.

The crumbling trail and the collapsing trail appear not much different from any other places where the path is steep and gravelly.

The flash flood area should show signs of severe runoff and erosion. It will still appear safe if there hasn't been much rain lately, but the pit can unleash the water from a pond into a gushing torrent.

The gusting wind is useful chiefly against flying characters, but it can be turned against anyone with some effect.

Crumbling Trail **Level 5 Hazard**
Terrain XP 200

Detect automatic **Initiative** –
Immune attacks

Triggered Actions

† Attack ♦ At-Will

Trigger: A creature enters a square of crumbling trail while moving uphill.

Attack (Free Action): Melee 0 (triggering creature); +8 vs. Reflex

Hit: 2d4 + 5 damage, and the target falls prone and slides 1 square downhill. If the target was already prone, it takes no damage and does not slide, but its turn ends immediately.

Countermeasures

♦ **Balance:** Acrobatics DC 15. *Success:* The character can move into a square of crumbling trail without triggering the trail's attack.

Collapsing Trail **Level 6 Hazard**
Terrain XP 250

Detect automatic **Initiative** –
Immune attacks

Triggered Actions

† Attack ♦ At-Will

Trigger: A creature enters a square of collapsing trail while moving uphill.

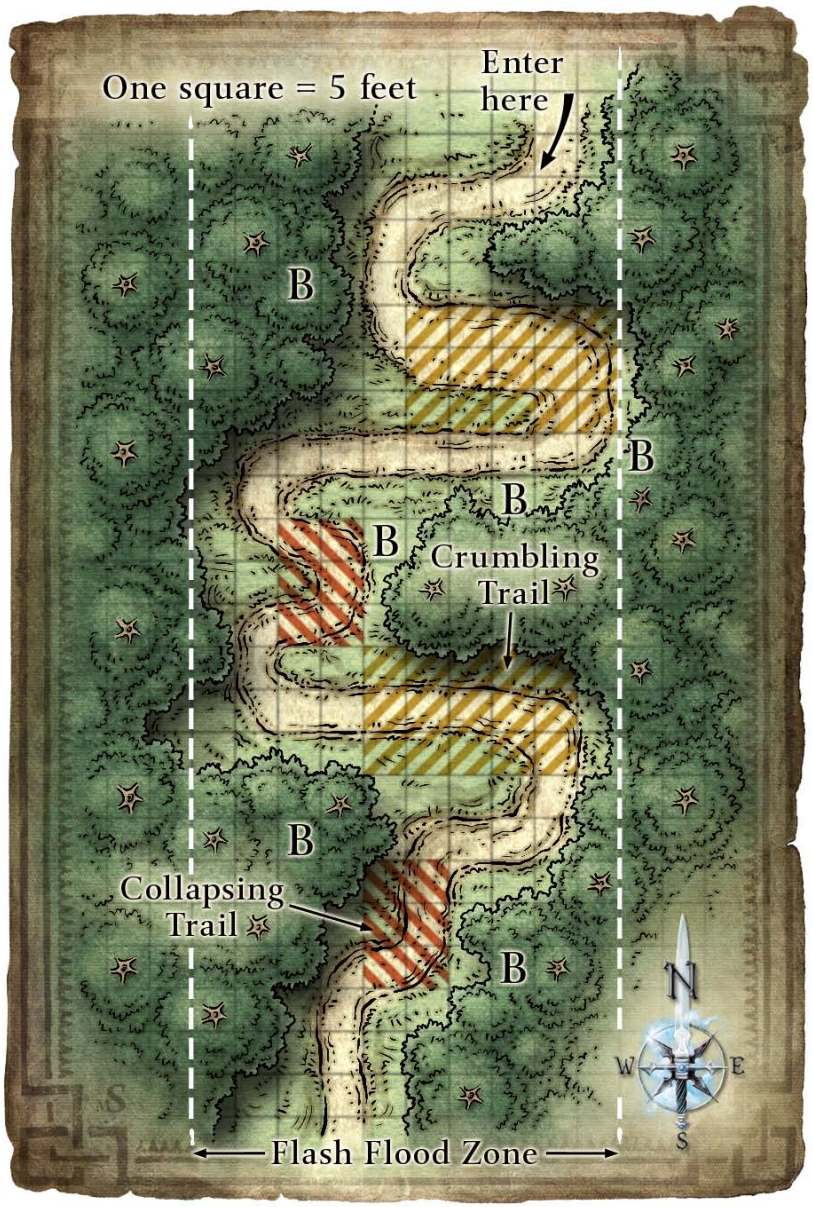
Attack (Free Action): Melee 0 (triggering creature); +9 vs. Reflex

Hit: 2d6 + 2 damage, and the target falls prone and slides 5 squares downhill. It the target was already prone, it takes no damage and its turn ends immediately.

Miss: Half damage, and the target sides 2 squares downhill. If the target was already prone, it takes no damage and its turn ends immediately.

Countermeasures

♦ **Dodge:** Acrobatics or Athletics DC 15. *Success:* The character can move into a square of collapsing trail without triggering the trail's attack.



Flash Flood	**Level 8 Hazard**
Terrain	XP 350
Detect Perception DC 16 or Nature DC 24	**Initiative** +8
Immune attacks	

Triggered Actions

† Attack ♦ At-Will

Trigger: A creature enters a square in the area affected by the flash flood.

Attack (Opportunity Action): Close burst 10 (creatures in the burst); +11 vs. Fortitude

Hit: 1d10 + 5 damage, and the targets falls prone and slides 8 squares downhill.

Miss: Half damage, and the target slides 4 squares downhill.

Countermeasures

♦ **Detect:** Perception DC 16. *Success:* Characters who make successful Perception checks at the edge of the flash flood area can add their Strength modifiers to their Fortitude defense against the attack made by the flash flood.

Gusting Wind	**Level 7 Hazard**
Terrain	XP 300
Detect Perception DC 16	**Initiative** +8
Immune attacks	

Triggered Actions

† Attack ♦ At-Will

Trigger: A creature enters the area of the gusting wind.

Attack (Opportunity Action): Close burst 2 (creatures in the burst); +10 vs. Fortitude

Hit: 2d6 + 4 damage, the target is pushed 2 squares downhill and toward the ground, and its movement ends.

Miss: Half damage, and the target is pushed 2 squares downhill.

Countermeasures

♦ **Evade:** Acrobatics DC 23. *Success:* The creature takes half damage and is pushed 1 square.

The Proving Pit

On reaching the valley floor, the characters emerge from the trees and get their first look at the Proving Pit and the Scarblade. The area is abandoned at first. Allow the characters a few minutes to poke around and get their bearings but not enough time to really explore the area. The buildings are mostly abandoned, but there are signs of recent inhabitants.

After a few minutes, Morrn Bladeclaw appears. He is followed by the pit's denizens, both real and spectral; then challenges are issued to the characters.

When characters reach the valley floor, read:

The dense forest along the trail opens onto the floor of a small glen. A few well-worn dirt paths flanked by scrub bushes lead to a wide, irregularly shaped pit with an eroded and crumbling edge. The valley floor slopes gently toward the pit. Around it stand a few crumbling, decrepit shacks and decaying wooden bleachers that provide an unobstructed view into the depression. The sky is overcast, and light rain is beginning to fall. Through the gloom, a pale glow shimmers wanly from the pit.

When characters look into the pit, read:

Before you is a well-used gladiatorial arena, battle-scarred and bloodstained. It is 10 feet deep, and the walls of eroded stone and crumbling soil are nearly vertical. They are interspersed with dark, barred windows and narrow, rusted doors. A dais dominates the center of the pit. Rain is gathering into shallow puddles on the floor.

The scene is bathed in a pale blue light that emanates from a block of crystal on the south wall. Within the translucent crystal is a dark shape that suggests the contours of a large sword.

A humanoid apparition shimmers into view atop the low dais. It carries a spectral sword that resembles the object in the crystal. It studies you for a few moments, then raises its hands and speaks, turning slowly in place as if addressing an unseen audience. "Who yearns for justice? Judgment? Fame? Who seeks glory through victory over all challengers?" Then it faces you and points the sword toward you. "They do. They have come to confront their destiny in the Proving Pit!"

The characters can converse with the spectral figure of Morrn Bladeclaw. His speech is harsh and aggressive. He will describe the pit, its purpose, and even his own history, but not at great length. He expects the characters to compete.

If someone asks about the sword, he replies that it is the ultimate prize for victory, and one worthy of the greatest champion in the land—which is he.

All of Morrn Bladeclaw's conversation steers toward getting the characters to prove their worth by fighting.

If someone agrees, a ghostly horn appears in Morrn's fist. He raises it to his lips and blows out a long, mournful note. As the note fades, other shapes come into view in the surrounding stands. Phantom humanoids of every kind—pit shadows, spirits of combatants long dead—have gathered to enjoy the spectacle. A few living combatants appear at the pit doors.

If the characters do not agree but they are already in the pit, Morrn blows the horn anyway. If the characters are not in the pit but are near the edge, the ground buckles as if alive and the edge crumbles to dump them into the pit; use the crumbling trail or collapsing trail hazard. Characters can retreat from the area if they so choose, but the pit will harry them with hazards during the entire trek out of the valley, and it will fill their minds with visions of shame and defeat until they get beyond its range.

Morrn is the master and grand champion of the pit, and he does not fight in any preliminary matches. Before characters can challenge Morrn, each of them must win at least one preliminary match. Morrn doesn't mention this up front (he doesn't expect the characters to survive that long). He will explain it if asked.

Matches can be fought one-on-one or in teams. In team matches, the opponents should include at least three pit shadows. Early matches will be against foes of the characters' level, but as the characters accumulate victories (assuming there is more than one match), the opposition gets tougher.

The first opponent Morrn pits against the newcomers is Marok, a half-orc death mage and the pit's current champion. You can substitute any appropriate foe, dead or alive. If more than one character wants to fight Marok, he can be accompanied by several pit shadows plus a suitable number of orc rampagers, orc pummelers, and orc storm shamans (*Monster Vault*).

One round after combat begins, Morrn activates the spiked chain pinwheel trap.

There are no rules, and all fights are to the death unless a character runs away. Someone who retreats from a fight will be jeered cruelly by the spectators, be pelted with rotten fruit or stones, and possibly pursued by enemies if other characters don't intervene.

Portions of the pit's rim that are noted as dangerous should be treated as crumbling trail hazards.

Characters can fight as many matches in the pit as they like. The spectators are against the newcomers at first, but if they fight multiple matches and put on a good show, the crowd swings noticeably in their favor. Characters can take a short rest after the first match. After that, Morrn tries to start a new match immediately after the last one ends, so that a character who fights back-to-back matches has no chance to rest between them. If the party is 7th level, you can relax this a bit. If the party is 9th level, press them hard.

Development

Once each character has fought and won at least once, either individually or as part of a group, the characters can challenge Morrn Bladeclaw. If the players don't think of this on their own, or don't seem inclined to do it, the crowd begins to chant, "Bladeclaw! Bladeclaw!"

Morrn Bladeclaw and the Scarblade

When Morrn is ready to fight the characters, read:

"Few dare face me, and fewer survive. I know the draw of the Scarblade. I know the drive of the pit. Long have I heard their whispers. Perhaps you will join the shadowy spectators, if the pit deems you worthy. I salute your courage now, before the match. Afterward, a salute would be too late for you."

Morrn Bladeclaw is willing to fight alone against one or two characters, just as he did as a gladiator. He won't fight the whole party by himself, however. If everyone gangs up against him, he calls on the aid of past victims. They appear in the form of pit shadows, a blue arcanian, and dread guardians. The blue arcanian represents the wizard who slew Morrn, and was slain by him, in the bout that cost Morrn his life. The pit shadows and dread guardians are nameless foes he vanquished over his career. Use enough foes to make this a level + 2 encounter for the characters.

No other competitors or spectators join in. Many of them would love to see Morrn defeated, but they fear attacking him themselves.

At the start of this final bout, several massive stone blocks (shown on the map) slowly rise from the pit floor to stand 10 feet high.

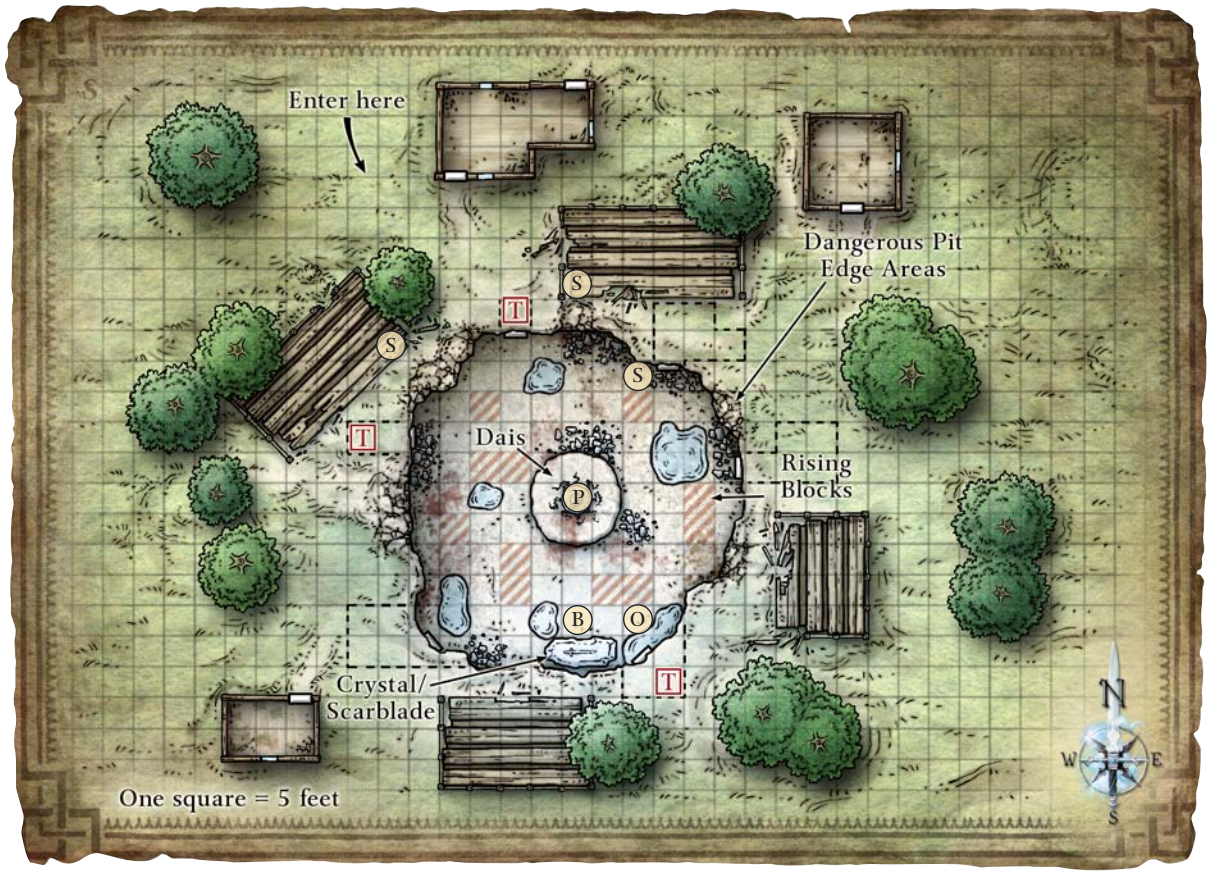
Development

When Morrn first becomes bloodied, the real Scarblade senses that his destruction is near. It triggers a crevasse as an immediate reaction, which shatters the crystal and splits the ground from the block of crystal to the center of the pit. The sword psychically calls out to the character it deems best suited to wield it, though anyone can pick it up from the shattered bits of crystal, including Morrn Bladeclaw. If a character grabs it, Morrn focuses all his attacks against that character.

If Morrn is killed, the pit becomes dormant for 24 hours. The spiked chain pinwheel grinds to a halt. The pit shadows disappear, and any living combatants slink away into the forest or into the rooms adjoining the pit. Some of them might speak to the characters or even congratulate them. A few might even immediately challenge them for the weapon. For the next 24 hours, everyone is free to leave the valley unhindered. If the Scarblade is removed from the valley within that time, Morrn's ghost is released from the valley and never returns. A day later, the Proving Pit reactivates and slowly begins calling new combatants.

About the Author

Sterling Hershey somehow finds the time to be both an architect and freelance game designer. Over the years, he worked extensively in a galaxy far, far away, on the *Star Wars Roleplaying Game* and *Star Wars Miniatures* game, as well as contributing to Dungeons & Dragons® products. Sterling lives in the Midwest with his wife, Mary.



Features of the Pit

Illumination: During the day, bright illumination from an overcast sky. At night, dim illumination cast by the crystal block that holds the Scarblade. Dim illumination in the buildings and pit rooms.

Blocks (red shaded areas): These are solid stone blocks 10 feet high. They rise up from the floor only for the final battle against Morrn Bladeclaw.

Puddles: Puddles are difficult terrain.

Rubble: Rubble and large rocks are difficult terrain and provide partial cover.

Low Dais: The low stone dais includes Morrn Bladeclaw's horizontal headstone, which indicates that he died 30 years ago. The dais is normal terrain.

Pit: The pit is 3 squares (15 feet) deep.

Walls: The walls are easy to grip but unstable. A DC 20 Athletics check is required to climb.

Pit Rooms: These small rooms are used to hold combatants, willingly or unwillingly. Some have decaying ladders that lead to trapdoors (T) on the surface. From above, the trapdoors are overgrown with moss and weeds, so that a DC 16 Perception check is needed to spot one.

Crystal Block: This glowing crystal provides cover and holds the Scarblade. It is immune to all damage but shatters when Morrn Bladeclaw is first bloodied.

Pit Shadows	**Level 7 Minion Skirmisher**
Medium shadow humanoid (undead)	XP 75
HP 1; a missed attack never damages a minion.	**Initiative** +8
AC 21, **Fortitude** 20, **Reflex** 20, **Will** 18	**Perception** +3
Speed fly 6 (hover); phasing	
Immune disease, necrotic, poison	
Standard Actions	
⊕ **Pit Strike** (necrotic) ♦ **At-Will**	
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +12 vs. AC	
Hit: 7 necrotic damage.	
✧ **Pit Wail** (thunder) ♦ **At Will**	
Attack: Close blast 3 (creatures in the blast); +10 vs. Fortitude	
Hit: 7 thunder damage, and the target is pushed 1 square.	
Skills Stealth +11	
Str 4 (+0) **Dex** 16 (+6)	**Wis** 10 (+3)
Con 17 (+6) **Int** 4 (+0)	**Cha** 12 (+4)
Alignment chaotic evil **Languages** Common	

Marok, Half-Orc Death Mage (O) **Level 7 Elite Controller**
Medium natural humanoid, half-orc XP 600

HP 148; **Bloodied** 74 **Initiative** +8
AC 21, **Fortitude** 20, **Reflex** 22, **Will** 21 **Perception** +11, low-light vision
Speed 6
Saving Throws +2; **Action Points** 1

Standard Actions

Rotting Touch (necrotic) ♦ **At-Will**
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +10 vs. Fortitude
Hit: 2d6 + 3 necrotic damage, and the target loses necrotic resistance or immunity and takes ongoing 5 necrotic damage (save ends both).

Bolt of Putrescence (implement, necrotic) ♦ **Recharge** ⚄ ⁞⁞
Attack: Ranged 10 (one creature); +10 vs. Reflex
Hit: 3d8 + 9 necrotic damage, and the target takes a -5 penalty to all defenses until the end of Marok's next turn.

Swarm of Flies (implement, zone) ♦ **Encounter**
Attack: Area burst 1 within 10 (creatures in the burst); +10 vs. Fortitude
Hit: 3d6 + 12 damage, and the burst creates a zone of swarming flies that lasts until the end of the encounter. Each creature that starts its turn in the zone takes 5 damage and does not have line of sight to squares more than 3 squares away from it. As a minor action, Marok can move the zone 2 squares.

Triggered Actions

Furious Assault ♦ Encounter
Trigger: Marok damages an enemy with an attack
Effect (Free Action): The triggering attack deals 1d10 extra damage.

Death Mark (necrotic) ♦ **Encounter**
Trigger: An enemy reduces Marok to 0 hit points.
Effect (No Action): The triggering enemy takes 2d10 + 5 necrotic damage.

Skills Arcana +9, Intimidate +8, Religion +11

Str 15 (+5)	**Dex** 20 (+8)	**Wis** 17 (+6)
Con 10 (+3)	**Int** 13 (+4)	**Cha** 13 (+3)

Alignment evil **Languages** Common, Giant
Equipment robes, staff

Morrn Bladeclaw (B) **Level 10 Elite Soldier**
Large natural humanoid (giant, undead) XP 1,000

HP 147; **Bloodied** 73 **Initiative** +12
AC 26, **Fortitude** 24, **Reflex** 20, **Will** 21 **Perception** +12
Speed 0, fly 6 (hover); phasing
Immune disease, poison; **Resist** 10 necrotic
Saving Throws +2; **Action Points** 1

Traits

Double Actions
Morrn makes two initiative checks and takes a full turn on each initiative result. He can take two immediate actions per round but only one between one turn and the next.

Insubstantial
Morrn takes half damage from all attacks, except those that deal force damage. Whenever Morrn takes radiant damage, he loses this trait until the start of his next turn.

Standard Actions

Spectral Sword (necrotic) ♦ **At-Will**
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +15 vs. AC
Hit: 1d12 + 7 damage, Morrn can push the target 1 square, and the target takes ongoing 5 necrotic damage (save ends).
Effect: Morrn marks the target until the end of Morrn's next turn.

Triggered Actions

Gladiator's Instinct ♦ At-Will
Trigger: An enemy enters a square where it flanks Morrn.
Attack (Immediate Reaction): Melee 1 (one creature flanking Morrn); +13 vs. Fortitude
Hit: Morrn pushes the target up to 3 squares.

Str 24 (+12)	**Dex** 20 (+10)	**Wis** 15 (+7)
Con 17 (+8)	**Int** 14 (+7)	**Cha** 19 (+9)

Alignment evil **Languages** Common

Blue Arcanian **Level 10 Controller**
Medium natural humanoid (undead) XP 500

HP 105; **Bloodied** 52 **Initiative** +5
AC 24, **Fortitude** 22, **Reflex** 21, **Will** 19 **Perception** +6
Speed 5

Standard Actions

Frost Staff (cold, weapon) ♦ **At-Will**
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +13 vs. Fortitude
Hit: 2d8 + 9 cold damage, and the arcanian pushes the target 2 squares. The target is immobilized until the end of the arcanian's next turn.

Bolt of Frost (cold, implement) ♦ **At-Will**
Attack: Ranged 5 (one creature); +13 vs. Fortitude
Hit: 2d8 + 9 cold damage, and the target's space and all squares adjacent to it are difficult terrain until the end of the arcanian's next turn.

Swirling Blizzard (cold, implement) ♦ **Encounter**
Attack: Area burst 2 within 5 (creatures in the burst); +13 vs. Reflex
Hit: 2d8 + 9 cold damage.
Miss: Half damage.

Triggered Actions

Staff of Shielding ♦ Encounter
Trigger: An attack hits the arcanian.
Effect (Immediate Interrupt): The arcanian gains a +4 bonus to all defenses against the triggering attack.

Arcane Surge ♦ Encounter
Trigger: The arcanian hits an enemy with an implement attack.
Effect (Free Action): The attack deals maximum damage to the enemy.

Skills Arcana +14

Str 10 (+5)	**Dex** 11 (+5)	**Wis** 13 (+6)
Con 17 (+8)	**Int** 19 (+9)	**Cha** 10 (+5)

Alignment chaotic evil **Languages** Common
Equipment staff

Dread Guardian **Level 7 Soldier**
Medium natural animate (undead) XP 300

HP 79; **Bloodied** 39 **Initiative** +6
AC 23, **Fortitude** 19, **Reflex** 17, **Will** 18 **Perception** +5
Speed 5 Low-light vision

Traits

☼ **Shield of Undeath** ♦ **Aura** 1
While the dread guardian's master is within the guardian's aura, the master takes half damage from all attacks.

Eyes of Undeath
The dread guardian's master can see or hear anything the guardian can see or hear. The master can also speak through the guardian.

Standard Actions

⊕ **Longsword** (weapon) ♦ **At-Will**
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +12 vs. AC
Hit: 2d8 + 6 damage.
Effect: The target is marked until the end of the guardian's next turn.

➶ **Longbow** (weapon) ♦ **At-Will**
Attack: Ranged 20/40 (one creature); +12 vs. AC
Hit: 1d10 + 6 damage.
Effect: The target is marked until the end of the guardian's next turn.

Triggered Actions

↯ **Iron Rebuke** (weapon) ♦ **At-Will**
Trigger: An enemy marked by the guardian attacks the guardian's master.
Attack (Opportunity Action): Melee 1 (triggering enemy); +14 vs. AC
Hit: 2d8 + 6 damage.

Str 16 (+6)	**Dex** 12 (+4)	**Wis** 14 (+5)
Con 15 (+5)	**Int** 4 (+0)	**Cha** 9 (+2)

Alignment unaligned **Languages** understands Common
Equipment scale armor, heavy shield, longsword, longbow, 20 arrows

Spiked Chain Pinwheel (P) **Level 6 Trap**
Object XP 250

Detect automatic Initiative +7
HP 60
AC 17, **Fortitude** 14, **Reflex** 14, **Will** –
Resist 5 all; **Immune** necrotic, poison, psychic, all conditions, ongoing damage

Traits

Spinning
The pinwheel rotates one-quarter turn each round. Two chains sweep out in opposite directions, and each chain can attack. On the round it is activated, the pinwheel attacks with one blast toward the northwest corner of the pit and another toward the southeast corner of the pit. On the second round, it attacks toward the northeast and southwest corners. Attacks alternate in this way until the pinwheel is bloodied, when it is reduced to just one attack per round.

Standard Actions

↯ **Attack** ♦ **At-Will**
Attack: Close burst 4 (creatures in the burst); +9 vs. Reflex
Hit: 2d8 + 5 damage, and the target falls prone and is immobilized (escape DC 15).

Countermeasures

♦ **Jam:** Thievery DC 23. *Success:* The pinwheel is disabled and stops attacking. *Failure:* The pinwheel attacks the character as an opportunity action.
♦ **Snag:** Thievery DC 15. *Success:* The pinwheel's attack becomes +6 vs. Reflex. *Failure:* The pinwheel attacks the character as an opportunity action.

Scarblade Level 10 Rare

The Scarblade is a dark and rugged bastard sword forged from a chaos shard. It resonates with greater power when it is within the Chaos Scar.

Lvl 10 +2 5,000 gp
Weapon: Heavy blade
Enhancement: Attack rolls and damage rolls
Critical: +2d10 damage, or +3d10 when within the Chaos Scar.
Property: Once per turn, when you hit with an attack using this weapon, the creature you hit takes 1d6 extra fire damage.
Property: Wounds created by the Scarblade leave ragged, ashen scars even when healed by magic. The weapon emits red sparks and leaves a black scorch mark when it hits.
Power (Daily): Standard Action. Striking the ground with the sword creates a crevasse 1 square wide, 5 squares long, and up to 2 squares deep beginning in the square you strike and extending in a straight line away from you. Any creature that is entirely in the affected area must save or fall into the crevasse.

Backdrop

Diyun: The Hanging City

By Will Hindmarch ✦ Illustration by Noah Bradley
Cartography by Mike Schley

"Welcome, travelers, to the Hanging City! Mind your step, and keep one hand on something solid—like your wits! Step right up, enter my lift, just a coin per head for a scenic ride to the top. Beats scaling the stairs, if you don't mind me saying. The finest gaming houses await you at the top of this chain, ready to challenge a clever sort like yourself. Need a hand with your bag? Don't want to lug that all the way to the top, do you? Hop on board. Nobody ever gets robbed riding the lift! And welcome, one and all, to Diyun!"

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Part of Diyun's power lies in its reputation. Rumors of its sordid scandals, roguish charm, and dangerous residents travel along trade routes and pilgrim's paths, as far as travelers will carry tales.

Diyun (dee-*yoon*) is known to travelers as the Hanging City for many reasons. Visitors marvel at its cliffside rope bridges and gawk at its many hanging prison cells, temporary homes to ruffians, spies, thieves, and, worst of all, gambling cheats. She is a city built on vice; her two true loves are food and gaming, and she overindulges in both. Ruled by a fat, charismatic overlord whose wealth and fabled skill at games draws enthusiasts from across the land, Diyun is a crossroads for some and a destination for others.

Most buildings in Diyun are cut into the high, gray walls of the river canyon, between thirty and sixty feet off the ground. Their entrances are linked together by rope bridges and bamboo scaffolding, whose precarious footing can prove treacherous to the unwary. People approaching Diyun from the busy river landings must either be hoisted up in cages or lifts, or climb many stories of rope-and-plank stairs. Travelers coming overland must descend narrow, treacherous stairways meant to funnel and obstruct attackers in the event of a siege.

Guests in Diyun might encounter great hospitality and luxury, or squalid ruin. The city was built in and above ancient caves, somce of which were once home to a variety of monsters. In other areas, tombs and shrines were carved into the cliffs by later residents. Most of these caverns, both natural and chiseled, now have wooden fronts and anterooms affixed to the cliffs outside. Inside, the repurposed temples are decorated with gaudy fabric and fancy furniture to create a feeling of casual luxury that has become synonymous with Diyun.

At its highest point, far above the river, the city is posh and palatial. In its middle reaches, bustling throngs crowd into low-ceilinged gaming dens, smoky taverns, and paper-walled teahouses. In the lowest areas, poor travelers and beaten-down residents throw stones and dice to test their luck, catch fish in the sluggish river, and sometimes disappear into the network of caves at the waterline, never to be seen again.

Word of Diyun Abroad

Part of Diyun's power lies in its reputation. Rumors of its sordid affairs, roguish charm, and dangerous residents travel along trade routes and pilgrim's paths, as far as travelers will carry tales. If you would prefer not to rely on a skill check to determine what characters can learn about Diyun from abroad, share the following bits of knowledge with players as you see fit. If characters have training in the associated skill, be more generous or more truthful with the information. If characters want to find out more, or to separate fact from fiction, they'll need to visit the city.

Arcana: Rumors abound that Kagamungo, the master of Diyun, has been favored by Avandra herself: that he is her half-monstrous son, that he beat her at a game of chance, that he wooed her and stole from her during his days as a petty thief. Which god he worships, if any, is a mystery. The city is said to still manifest remnants of ancient spells, cast by creatures that once dwelt in sanctums and lairs deep in the cliffs.

Dungeoneering: Forty or fifty years ago, Diyun was no more than a hideout for thieves and bandits, clinging to the edges of ancient catacombs and temples deep within the cliff area's natural stone towers. These timeworn places were once filled with the plunder of various monstrous races that used the catacombs as lairs. No small number of adventurers—some petty, some heroic—made their fortunes in the Diyun delta. A particularly lucky adventurer known as Kagamungo used the riches he discovered in the catacombs to found a trading center named for the river.

History: Kagamungo ("kaga" meaning "huge" in the local dialect) rules the city as a merchant king. His laws are neither strict nor lax, and he is the city's foremost judge. Trials are quick. Punishment is swift. Justice is often for sale.

The region's history stretches back well beyond the few decades of the city's current incarnation. Centuries before the city's founding, creatures such as naga and yuan-ti dwelled in the city's carved caves and arched tunnels.

Nature: Diyun is built in a dramatic river delta, where as the eons passed, flowing water carved limestone bluffs into a labyrinth of sheer rock towers. These towers are riddled with caves and tunnels, some formed by the water's relentless flow, some cut by ancient cultures or current residents. Rumor has it that nature spirits still dwell in the river and its underwater caves. Despite centuries of use by creatures of every ilk, the river has never truly been tamed.

Religion: Most gods are welcome in Diyun, as long as those who invoke them behave, play fair, and pay their debts. Diyun pays homage to Erathis through its system of laws and the elaborate rules of its many games, yet it also honors Ioun with games of skill and trivia. Kagamungo has publicly said he was a follower of Sehanine in his youth, but if his power over luck and chance is truly divine in nature, its source is a well-kept secret.

Streetwise: The lord mayor of Diyun is a huge man, known for his skill at games and his intolerance for spies and muckrakers. Kagamungo's past is a well-kept secret. It's widely rumored that certain nobles and rulers have offered rewards for his assassination, but those rumors have proven difficult to confirm. Anyone suspected of coming to Diyun with the intent of collecting such a bounty gets thrown from the highest level of the city to land among the razor-sharp stones and chill waves below.

At the Waterline

Life at the base of Diyun's great cliffs is ugly and hard. Lean-tos and awnings serve as shelter for an assortment of transients and permanent residents hoping to earn enough coin to buy passage upriver or up the cliffs. Lodging in these lower levels consists of curtained alcoves, free to whoever claims them first or most viciously, with no security against thieves or the damp. Life down here isn't stable enough for much of a power dynamic to form. The adventuring party or the family unit is usually the largest organization to survive more than a few weeks on this level.

The Green Stone City: Exploring a maze of half-flooded passages in the sea caves below Diyun's largest stone column reveals the remains of a city carved from green stone and lit by blue gems. It

is accessible only to those who have the means to breathe underwater, but its existence is documented in many tavern stories. Locals speculate that the lost city might be part of the dungeon that Kagamungo explored and plundered decades ago. The passages are thought to be thoroughly looted, but perhaps the runes and etchings on the walls contain the secrets to forgotten rituals or the maps to undiscovered treasure.

White Branch Caves: The White Branch is an offshoot of Diyun's riverway known for its smooth, white mud that has a way of getting into everything. The caves along that stream are maintained by charitable priests as homes for those who have been temporarily lost Avandra's favor. Barge-poling vendors offer fried fish for sale, and the compassionate priests offer soothing words and gambling strategies. Custom holds that throwing coins into the White Branch caves brings good luck to both the thrower and those who pick up the coins.

The Middle Reaches

The majority of Diyun's residents and visitors spend most of their time in the city's middle reaches, which are also home to raucous and well-stocked markets. These are great places to buy and sell antiques, relics, artifacts, and magic items discovered in distant lands or the surrounding jungle. Pawn shops and consignment shops abound, and dedicated bargain hunters can sometimes pick up fine weapons and armor pawned by down-on-their-luck heroes for considerably less than what they would pay elsewhere; a discount of 10 to 40 percent (roll a d4) is not uncommon.

Gorugo's House of Games: Gorugo's is a prime example of a mid-range gaming house. It is known for hosting games of skill in its cramped parlors, paneled in dirty red wood and hung with patterned lanterns that give off almost as much smoke as light. Rare and exotic games are brought to back rooms, testing the strategies and skills of both local and visiting gamesters. Visitors must be careful, though, because Gorugo's is located next to a set of crow's cages, where suspected cheats are left to rot unless someone buys their freedom (at a cost equaling the price of a magic item of the imprisoned character's level).

Gorugo himself is a one-eyed, gray-bearded dwarf with an unpredictable temper that rises and falls with his establishment's profit and loss at the game tables. He keeps a dozen private rooms for rent (1 gp per night, 5 gp per week) but offers few amenities aside from a bolted door and proximity to the games.

The Hidden Temple: Legend says that somewhere, deep within one of Diyun's sheer, rocky towers, is the hidden temple where Kagamungo made a pact to become master of the river delta and the city he

DINING AND DASHING IN DIYUN

Diyun offers plenty to do, whether you're a lowly street rat or a highly respected hero of the realm. Here are two examples of skill-based misadventures that show some of the city's breadth.

Social characters might secure themselves an audience with Kagamungo at one of his famously elaborate feasts. Characters navigating a table full of dignitaries, all trying to impress (and influence) the master of the Hanging City, could rely on Diplomacy (to make sparkling conversation), Insight (to sense the motives of other guests), Endurance (to weather a gut-busting, twenty-course feast), or even subtle applications of Bluff and Intimidate. Knowledge skills are suitable secondary skills for keeping up with the wide-ranging and surprisingly rich conversation. Those who impress Kagamungo might secure a private reception with him. Those who offend him might end up swaying above the river in a rusting iron cage.

For more physical characters, consider a parkour-style chase—perhaps from game-room guards after being caught cheating—through the city's dizzying heights, leaping from walkway to walkway, climbing scaffolds, and swinging on loose chains and ropes. Acrobatics, Athletics, and Streetwise are primary skills for such a chase, with Bluff, Intimidate, Perception, and Thievery useful as secondary skills for feinting, spotting routes, and creating openings in the crowds. If the chase begins in the open heights of the city, each failed check could result in a fall down to the next level of Diyun (and the loss of a healing surge). Characters who fail too many skill checks find themselves cornered at the bottom of the city.

For chases without a skill challenge, consider this simple chase method: First, the runner specifies the difficulty of a maneuver to be attempted and selects an appropriate skill for the attempt (Athletics to leap a gap, Acrobatics to tumble through a narrow doorway, and so forth). If the skill check succeeds, the pursuer must match the maneuver using a suitable skill and the same difficulty to keep up with the runner. The pursuer doesn't need to use the same skill as the runner, but the skill used must suit the situation. For example, the runner might use Athletics to leap a gap that the pursuer then swings across with Acrobatics, or the runner could vault over a knot of pedestrians with Acrobatics while the pursuer uses Intimidate to scatter the bystanders. The first participant in the chase to fail three skill checks loses the contest; the runner is caught, or the pursuer loses the runner's trail.

Use these DCs as guides. They can be adjusted based on conditions and character level.

- ✦ Dropping down one level while stationary: DC 15
- ✦ Sliding or rolling to a stop at the edge of a rooftop or a cliff face (from a run): DC 15
- ✦ Tumbling through a gap in scaffolding (or smashing through it): DC 18
- ✦ Tumbling down one level (from a run, landing stationary): DC 20
- ✦ Leaping from one rooftop or gantry to another in a close area (15-foot jump, +5 for uneven footing): DC 20
- ✦ Leaping down one level (from a run, landing at a run): DC 25

would found there. He supposedly stumbled upon the temple while exploring what was then the abandoned lair of long-dead monsters. Kagamungo's henchmen keep the location of any such temple a secret, if such a place even exists. The temple might reveal the source of Kagamungo's luck and might, and give someone else a chance to usurp it, if the place could be found.

The Perfect Blade Teahouse: This quaint and handsome house is cut into the stone and bisected with paper walls. Here, travelers congregate to politely share stories of adventure and to quietly plan future adventures. Although the place is named for the blades of bamboo leaves, the sign at the door depicts a sword bundled with blades of grass. Anyone who seeks swords for hire should order the oolong and ask for Ayalar, a half-elf and former mercenary who runs the teahouse.

Atop the Hanging City

At its most elevated heights, Diyun is a cozy nest for ambassadors, elite adventurers spending newfound wealth, drunken revelers, and hedonists indulging their most extravagant tastes. Perfumed diplomats gather in back rooms, and disguised spies collude in torchlit nooks. Diyun is a neutral crossroads for dignitaries and carousers from all over the region. Anything can be forgiven for a price—anything except intrigue against Kagamungo.

The Royal Treasure Game House is among the richest game houses in Diyun, second only to Kagamungo's palace. It is a gaudy place of gold thread and red velvet, where winners cheer and losers drink away their woes. The Royal Treasure offers high-stakes but comfortable gaming for great and noble players that don't feel up to the perils and debauchery of Kagamungo's palace.

Private rooms are 5 gp per night. They are protected by house guards, attended by valets, and allow access to a private feasting hall with other guests of the Royal Treasure. The owner, a tiefling named Tayla, wears gold rings on her hands and her horns. Sascha and Vischa, brother and sister humans, oversee day-to-day operations. They are rogues retired from the adventuring trade, and they have a predilection for old stories and new rumors.

Kagamungo's Palace: This is both the casino and the home of Kagamungo, lord mayor of the Hanging City. It is a palace as notorious and debauched, lavish and risqué, rich and dangerous, as Diyun itself. Kagamungo filled his domain over the years with weathered statues wearing fine silks, enormous vases and intricately decorated urns, beautiful servants to attend to his needs, and steadfast guards to protect his life. This is a place where fortunes are made and broken in a single night. All manner of souls flock to the outer parlors, where they can watch and join in

KAGAMUNGO: THE MAN OR THE MONSTER

Kagamungo was once human. What he is now depends on the needs of your campaign. He's intelligent and he's experienced, but how you model him in game terms depends on the level of the characters when they challenge him, if the situation comes to that.

It's best to introduce Diyun and Kagamungo many levels before you expect characters to be tough enough to confront him. He could be anything from a climactic heroic-tier foe to an epic solo monster. Or perhaps Kagamungo is more of a challenge for diplomats and courtiers than for swordplay.

Here are two options to work with.

The Monster: Kagamungo might no longer be human. He has been transformed by an ancient curse or a vengeful god into something that appears human, but is actually size Large, can unhinge its jaw, can swallow enemies whole, or can rally soldiers or minions as a leader can. This vision of Kagamungo is meant to be overcome—he is a crooked king on the throne of a corrupt city, which could be freed by heroes who are up to the challenging of deposing this creature.

The Man: Kagamungo might be a former adventurer following an obscure path. Perhaps he's a rogue or a cleric transformed by a rare paragon path or epic destiny; perhaps he has been cursed by some evil god.

Whatever the case, Kagamungo, although hedonistic and debauched, is not necessarily evil. He might need to be coaxed away from his luxurious excesses or rescued from his twisted advisors and courtiers, but he can be saved, and Diyun with him.

Whichever approach you take, you can quickly create a combat version of Kagamungo by altering the game statistics of a monster that fits your vision, whether it's a cyclops crusher (large, tough, and with an *evil eye* power to depict Kagamungo's sway over chance) or a neo-otyugh (make it Large, remove *threatening reach*, and describe its powers as aspects of might and luck), both from *Monster Vault*.

on the city's finest games, and to the inner chambers, where they can gamble for any stakes they're willing to risk. To win here is to have your name sung by traveling bards far and wide. To lose is to fade from memory. To cheat is to die.

Kagamungo's Palace does not rent rooms, but Kagamungo frequently invites interesting visitors to stay the night in his richly appointed guest suites, with lavish food and drink provided throughout their stay. Guests are expected to dine with Kagamungo at his feasting table and to be erudite, gracious, and entertaining. It's rude to decline, and ruder still to stay more than three nights.

Shrine of the Winged: High atop the southernmost spire of Diyun and reachable only by steps carved into the rock which are as much ladder as stairway, the Shrine of the Winged is a place of meditation and reflection. Much of Diyun is visible from its lofty height, from the green water at its feet to the gilded palaces that form its crown. Visitors are kept to a minimum by a druid who sits at the base of the stairs, telling prospective guests whether they can ascend immediately or must wait for someone to come back down. This arrangement ensures that callers at the shrine can be alone with their thoughts and with the many birds that nest in the trees and eaves of the shrine.

Games of Skill and Chance

Diyun is home to games of all sorts. Games of chance can be found anywhere from the warrens and hovels of the lower levels to the back rooms of the grand gambling dens in the uppermost stories of the city, but the people of Diyun prize contests of skill above all other types. They express their enthusiasm by betting on the outcomes. They honor winners with prestige and celebratory feasts.

Ribbons and circlets bestowed upon the winners of tournaments might grant a temporary +2 bonus to Diplomacy, Intimidate, or even Streetwise, at the DM's discretion, for up to a week after a tournament is won.

The people of Diyun's game houses are serious about games and the people who play them. Locals have a fondness for wagering on the unrevealed abilities of newcomers and travelers ("I'll bet you that swordsman is no good at numbers," says the salty riverman). They have a saying in Diyun: "A visitor is a random thing, a gift from chance." Patrons of the gaming houses love to match newcomers against each other and bet on the outcomes. This leads to occasional abuse when someone brings in a ringer, but enough people pass through Diyun in a typical week to keep the games going fairly. A first-time visitor to the city can expect to be dragged into at least one or two such contests, and many more if they're good sports about it.

For the detailed rules of many gambling games and contests, see the article "Gambler's Games" in *Dragon* 398.

Diyun takes gambling seriously, and it treats cheating as a serious crime. You might impose especially difficult DCs on skill checks that involve cheating, because everyone in Diyun is constantly on guard against such activity. Getting caught in the act might signal the start of a chase, the need for a costly bribe, or the beginning of several long days in a crow's cage.

About the Author

Will Hindmarch is a freelance writer and game developer whose work has appeared in numerous pen-and-paper role-playing games, board games, and video games over the past decade. He is also co-founder of Gameplaywright Press and a periodic contributor to *The Escapist* magazine. Do not talk to him about zeppelins or we will be here all day.

PARAGON 11-20

Killing Ground

By D. Jason Wofford

Illustration by Patrick McEvoy ♦ Cartography by Mike Schley

Sinister forces have seized a secluded forest in a forgotten corner of the Feywild. The wilderness, reflecting the brutal will of its conquerors, has warped into a sentient shifting maze, its relentless, crawling expansion fueled by an insatiable hunger for prey. Enchanting song drifts from the maze's shadowed ways, luring all who hear it to their doom. In this adventure, the heroes find themselves trapped and hunted for sport in the maze's twisting paths.

"Killing Ground" is an adventure for five characters of levels 11 to 13. By incorporating some or all of the random encounters provided, or by adding your own, the characters' travails in the maze can be expanded extensively.

Background

Ancient conduits of arcane power cover the natural world and the Feywild like an eldritch web. Civilizations feel compelled to build along these ley lines, often erecting their most sacred sites where the subtle paths intersect to form magical fonts of unfathomable strength. In the Feywild, these intersections create fey demesnes, places where the environment itself attunes to the strongest denizen's disposition.

One such demesne exists in the heart of a lush, lonely wood tucked away from the ageless eyes of the eladrin and the endless ambitions of the fomorian tyrants. Three great cities built by three different

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civilizations rose and fell here during the past millennia, but their stories are lost to time. For many generations, the land lay still and silent. Eventually, a firbolg clan came in search of wild game. Attuning to the Master of the Wild Hunt, the demesne transformed to suit the firbolgs' needs. Vegetation swallowed the forgotten ruins, wildlife bred in abundance, and many seasons passed in relative harmony.

Several months ago, the demesne experienced its first worldfall in centuries, at a terrible cost. While the forest was overlapping the mortal realm, minotaur initiates of the abominable Blood League discovered it. Craving the beating hearts of woodland fey, the minotaurs rode the worldfall back to the Feywild and rampaged through the region. While stalking a dusk unicorn, they stumbled upon the Animus Spire, a towering gemstone monolith at the intersection of the demesne's ley lines. Fueled by a lust for blood and emboldened by arcane energies, the cabalists ritually slaughtered the unicorn at the base of the spire. Claiming its heart for himself, the cabal's leader, Takis, devoured the unicorn's power to become a fearsome shardhorn hunter. As the wicked beast's victorious roar erupted through the trees, beautiful fey maidens appeared in a swell of haunting song, manifesting the demesne's newly born hunger. In response to their enchanting melody, the ruin-speckled wilderness warped into a vast, living maze.

Now firbolg survivors are trapped like prey in their own territory, struggling to reclaim their sacred home. Worldfall occurs frequently, allowing the deadly maze to threaten both the Feywild and the mortal realm. Through day and night, the sirens' song lures countless creatures to their deaths in the Blood League's killing ground.

Synopsis

Whether by accident or by design, the heroes become trapped in the living maze. Start with the appropriate story hook from "Involving the Heroes" or create your own. Once the heroes are traveling toward the maze, give them a chance to experience the outskirts' strange phenomena before they venture inside or are drawn in by the sirens' song. Allow them to explore the shifting ways just long enough to figure out that the maze responds to their decisions, and then drop them into Encounter 1.

The heroes interact or contend with other creatures that are lost or lairing in the maze while at the same time being harassed by sirens. They gradually realize that a cabal of Blood League minotaurs is hunting them for sport. Use the "Stalking Shadows" skill challenge to blend your dissemination of information to the players with exploration and encounters. Anticipate using three to five encounters to complete the skill challenge, including whatever mix of combat and social interaction suits your group. If you wish to extend the adventure, incorporate all of the random encounters and make the firbolgs a major faction.

Because the firbolgs take an interest in the heroes and know more about the labyrinth than any of the demesne's other inhabitants, at least one encounter should involve them. They should test the heroes' combat prowess early in the adventure. Depending on how that interaction concludes, the firbolgs can either become an important faction or play an ancillary role, providing any information the heroes miss.

Encounter 2 is the turning point of the adventure—an ambush on an ancient bridge that spans one of the ley lines. In that encounter, observant heroes can see the pivotal role ley lines play in forming fey demesnes and might figure out the Blood League's role in shaping this one. From there, the heroes will most likely follow the ley line to the demesne's core and liberate the land by defeating Takis in Encounter 3, a climactic battle under the Animus Spire's arcane glow.

Alternatively, the heroes might continue exploring the maze. If things start drifting off track, you can stress the importance of liberating the realm by staging a minotaur raid against the firbolg camp, letting the heroes discover the body of a murdered eladrin child, or something else that stresses the importance of forcing a final confrontation.

Once Takis falls, the demesne reverts to normal and everyone trapped there is free to leave.

Involving the Heroes

Worldfall brings the killing ground to the mortal realm from dusk until dawn. Heroes in the natural world might travel to the proper location during the day and witness a spectacular union of the planes when the sun's rays fade. They could also encounter the maze while in the Feywild, or they might hear of it in the mortal realm and use a ritual to reach the demesne on either plane.

City Hook: Intriguing Rumors

Rumor spreads of a worldfall in the wilderness several days outside town. Mysterious singing drifts out from deep inside the Feywild forest. It grows louder and more enchanting each night, but no one who follows the enticing song ever returns. The longer the heroes remain in town, the more they hear villagers and farmland refugees lamenting the loss of loved ones.

Wilderness Hook: Ephemeral Song

While resting one evening, the heroes hear the distant echo of singing maidens. The song returns each night, no matter where they characters are, as long as they stay in the same general area. Eventually, the heroes camp in a spot where they witness a worldfall. They see paths winding into crumbling ruins that are blanketed with thick vegetation. The singing originates from within the ruins.

When the heroes take an extended rest near where the labyrinth makes worldfall, read:

The sun's last rays fade as the soothing song swells to harmonize with the chirping crickets. Time appears to slow even as the waning light intensifies into a mesmerizing dusk. The distant forest seems to sway to the call of the Feywild.

THE BRIGHT BEAUTY

As discussed in *Manual of the Planes*™, magic is a tangible force in the Feywild. Arcane energy courses through the plane, stimulating extreme physical and emotional sensations. Colors are more vibrant, sounds ring with a distinct edge, and scents can be entrancing or overpowering. This phenomenon also affects behavior, causing creatures to exaggerate their strongest tendencies. The brave become brash, unease leads to panic, and competition becomes conflict.

The Maze

The fertile fields outside the maze gradually give way to a tangle of trees and undergrowth too thick to be traversed other through a labyrinth of overgrown trails. Those who try cutting a path quickly discover that much of the vegetation is carnivorous and will defiantly regenerate to trap and feed on unwary trailblazers. The sirens' song echoes from the shifting passageways into the outskirts as the sirens rove the maze, fueled by the hunt.

Outskirts

Characters with a passive Perception of 14 or higher are aware of the maze's crawling expansion. Forest squares bordering any path are blocking terrain rather than difficult terrain. Benign vegetation becomes hostile when heroes attempt to cut their own path or try to leave the maze. Use the elite dagger-thorn briar (*Dungeon Master's Guide*®, page 90), but remember that the maze wants to bring creatures in and keep them from escaping. It will not assault creatures that willingly enter and explore its passages. So, for example, if the heroes try to leave, are attacked by the vegetation, and then choose to relent and reenter the maze, all plant life reverts to a passive state and allows the heroes to move on.

When heroes first reach the outskirts, they become subject to *siren song*. To represent the call of sirens periodically passing near the edges of the maze, use *siren song* each hour that the heroes remain in the outskirts. From this point on, they are in danger of being mesmerized by the haunting melody.

Some of the Feywild's most confusing and frustrating phenomena involve anomalies in the flow of time and in distances. In the outskirts, a DC 20 Arcana check or a DC 28 Perception check reveals that traveling away from the maze takes twice as long as traveling the same distance toward the maze. Time seems to pass normally, and travelers cannot detect any anomaly in their movement speed. The anomaly becomes apparent only when a hero chooses a landmark and compares the distance covered when he or she moves toward and away from it. For example, a creature that normally travels at 3 miles per hour covers only a mile and a half in an hour of travel away from the maze. This effect extends for 30 miles outside the entry arch. It does not hinder the killing ground's advance. The effect ends when a creature passes through an entry arch into the maze, although the shifting passageways have their own temporal anomalies (see "The Shifting Ways").

Places of Note

Entry Arch: This heavily weathered remnant of a once-grand civilization rides the edge of the maze's expansion, choked by abundant foliage. An intricately carved gemstone arch climbs 60 feet high, framing an overgrown trail. In times past, the gemstone proved to have an affinity for arcane energy, so the arch was constructed and used as a nexus to amplify the effectiveness of travel rituals. Now it interacts with the demesne's magic in a more sinister manner. Stepping through the arch brings creatures firmly into the Blood League's killing ground. Once the arch is out of sight, the entrance vanishes, replaced by a wall of vegetation.

Ruined Arch: This arch did not withstand the passage of time as well as its counterpart. A flaw in the gemstone released an explosive force that blasted the apex of the arch the first time the stone was used in a ritual, leaving only the remains of each side. The bulk of the monument now lies in rubble that blocks the path. Creatures that climb over the rubble and set foot on the trail are firmly in the killing ground. When they lose sight of the entryway, it ceases to exist on their side of the maze.

Ley Lines

Several ley lines intersect to form the demesne. Since their form does not necessarily reveal their function, they cannot be detected with the naked eye. One runs along a deep vein of precious minerals. One follows the path of a crystal chasm. Another flows with invigorating streams over a series of breathtaking waterfalls. Despite their various forms, the ley lines have two things in common: They are the only stable paths in the killing ground, and they converge at the Animus Spire. When the adventure begins, only the firbolgs know this information.

Ruins

The killing ground is speckled with battered edifices from three unknown civilizations. Each of the two most recent were built from the rubble of their predecessors, making each ruin a collage. Judging by the scope of the architecture, all three civilizations had grand vision. Few monuments stand less than 50 feet high, and most incorporate the crystals and gemstones common to this region of the Feywild.

The Shifting Ways

The vast main section of the maze extends from the inner side of the entry arches to the outer border of the central clearing containing the Animus Spire. Past the entry arch and inside the shifting ways, life is a constant battle for survival. The wilderness reacts to creatures' decisions, corralling prey away from the ley lines. Plant life spreads, blossoms, and uproots to alter pathways when no one is looking. Trapped beasts stalk the maze, ravenous and frenzied from the sirens' relentless manipulations. Worst of all, Blood League minotaur cabalists prowl the shifting ways in search of powerful hearts to devour. They are cunning, sadistic hunters and the ultimate masters of the killing ground. Cabalists benefit from innate direction sense while roaming the maze, and the demesne often changes to reflect their mood.

After the heroes enter the shifting ways, expect them to be there for at least a full day, possibly even several, but less than a week. Check for random encounters every 4 to 6 hours, and any time the heroes leave one location and head to another. An encounter occurs on a result of 1–7 on a d10. See the Random Encounter table for a list of possible encounters, or make a few of your own.

Even when the heroes avoid a fight, make sure they have plenty of unsettling interaction with the maze and the sirens. The maze is a capricious entity that often shifts in response to heroes' actions. Give the demesne its own personality, and don't be afraid to toy with adventurers. For example, if the heroes head toward a ley line, they could hear the rustle of foliage behind them and turn to investigate. Although they see nothing untoward, they then hear rustling from the direction they were originally facing, only to discover that the maze has changed where the path

leads. As in the outskirts, any time the heroes attempt to blaze a trail or leave, the maze reacts violently (use the elite daggerthorn briar) and possibly calls out to sirens as well.

The sirens' song attracts all manner of creatures. Many pursue the sound to the exclusion of all else. Withered bodies litter the shifting ways, remains of those so bewitched by the song that they died of thirst and starvation rather than break away from the wondrous melody. Though sirens often manifest alone, two or more occasionally appear together in order to divide and conquer. Once their quarry is sufficiently imperiled, the sirens vanish. For example, the heroes might encounter a siren slipping down an intersecting path but suddenly hear angry beasts approaching from all directions, attracted by the sirens' song. Will they break through the foliage and attack? Perhaps the siren is leading the heroes into another ambush. Although it might not always start a fight, *siren song* should get everyone's blood pumping. It should be an undeniable warning that something very bad is about to happen. Getting away from it is the tricky part (see "The Sirens" below for their *siren song* power).

As in the outskirts, uncanny magical effects abound in the shifting ways. Destructive tempests infused with arcane energy rage across the skies, transforming the land in their wake (see Encounter 2 for the arcane tempest hazard). Areas of fixed dawn and dusk, spontaneous localized changes of season, and other effects become more frequent when creatures approach a ley line. As long as the Blood League reigns, the natural cycles of the demesne run amok.

While in the shifting ways of the killing ground, heroes should feel the desperation of being trapped inside what is essentially a wild beast that wants to make them suffer before they die. Include plenty of moments when the heroes know they are being watched or sense something lurking nearby but cannot pinpoint its location. Is that noise the maze shifting again, or is it some creature preparing to strike from the shadows? In short, the heroes should feel hunted. Everything is prey here, and the characters should know that, even before they meet others who can verify it by word or deed.

Firbolg Settlement

The firbolg camp just outside the shifting ways was once a modest collection of large huts and camouflaged tree dwellings. Now it is overrun by Blood League minotaurs. Any semblance of order and peace has been obliterated. Crude symbols of Baphomet defile the firbolg's religious icons of the Maiden, the Mother, and the Crone. Proud hunting trophies lie trampled, replaced by the Blood League's grotesque displays of carnage. The stench of smoke and death permeates the air, while pooling blood soaks the soil. Outlying portions of the settlement were put to the torch when the League sacked it. A few conflagrations have been stoked into raging bonfires with lumber from the camp's former defenses. The minotaurs lair here between hunts, reveling in the beast within.

The Animus Spire

At the heart of the maze, in a clearing roughly 70 feet in diameter, several ley lines intersect. A rough spike of minerals towers above the surrounding wilderness, gleaming with arcane power. It is a solid slab of gems and precious minerals 20 feet wide at the base and tapering to a sharp point at a height of 200 feet. The firbolgs call it the Animus Spire, for it seems to amplify the fey plane's call to the wild. It sheds bright light in 10-square radius. Arcane attack powers used in that radius gain a +2 bonus to their attack rolls.

Although the monetary value of such an object is incalculable, attempting to move or mine it is perilous at best. A creature that simply touches the Animus Spire feels arcane energy but suffers no ill effects. A creature that attacks the spire takes 4d10 psychic damage, teleports to a random location in the shifting ways, and is stunned (save ends). These effects occur as an immediate interrupt triggered by the attack.

With the arrival of the Blood League, innumerable beasts and monsters flocked to the spire, where they quickly succumbed to frenzy. Now a brawling swarm constantly surrounds the monolith. Plants grow at an accelerated rate and blossom in grand proportions to blanket the area with a cloud of pollen that shimmers with arcane energy. Civilized creatures that remain near the spire and manage to survive eventually go feral and join the constant battle. Blood League cabalists frequent this clearing, and many never leave, preferring to lose themselves in the thrill of unending violence.

Denizens

Creatures of any kind you choose can be found in the labyrinth, but two groups are prominent: the minotaurs and the firbolgs. The sirens are a smaller but still important third facet of the demesne's environment.

Sirens

Sirens are not so much creatures as they are manifestations of the demesne's newly born hunger. The sirens have no lair, and they need neither nourishment nor sleep. They can appear alone, in pairs, or in groups, manifesting at a moment's notice and

vanishing just as quickly. Each assumes the form of a beautiful, singing, fey maiden, but their specific appearances vary widely. They often appear innocent or afraid but can also take more tempting forms, staying ever ahead and out of reach.

Sirens lure creatures deeper into danger with their soothing, enchanting song. The music is mysterious and hypnotizing to nearby creatures. It can be so overpowering that weak-willed creatures might abandon their survival instinct and follow the song until they can no longer move. This aspect of their song allows the sirens to instigate hectic battles and set up devastating minotaur ambushes. The sirens do not serve the Blood League, just as the demesne does not directly obey Takis.

In addition to perpetuating the hunt, the sirens serve a protective role, keeping sentient creatures away from the ley lines and the Animus Spire. Whenever a creature approaches a ley line, sirens swarm with increasing vigor and in greater numbers. A DC 28 Insight check reveals this tendency, providing a clue about the importance of the ley lines.

Siren Song (charm, psychic) ♦ **At-Will**
Attack: Close burst 5 (enemies in the burst); +15 vs. Will
Hit: The target is dominated until the end of its next turn. The siren can force a dominated target to take only move actions that place the target closer to it. The siren cannot force a target to attack the target's allies or to expend attack powers.
Miss: The siren pulls the target up to 3 squares.

STORY VS. STAT BLOCK

No detailed map exists for the maze's twisting paths, nor have statistics blocks been created for the sirens. The maze and the sirens are more effective as narrative elements—tools to help you build atmosphere, propel the plot, and ignite explosive encounters. By reacting when heroes act, the maze becomes a villain to be outwitted rather than merely a location to be navigated. Thinking of the maze as an entity rather than a place is the most important step in running (and surviving) the adventure.

Sirens are not just minions of the maze. They are manifestations of its will, and thus can appear in endless quantity and variety to harry the heroes at any given moment. To avoid railroading players with an unavoidable domination effect, use the *siren song* power sparingly. If heroes insist on attacking sirens, consider the creatures to be insubstantial and to possess forest walk and a high rate of regeneration. You could also treat sirens as easily defeated minions, but there are always more to take the place of the slain.

Firbolgs

Firbolgs are consummate hunters of the Feywild, fierce and proud warriors of the unforgiving wilderness. Despite being the size of giantkin, they stalk the demesne with feline grace and collect trophies to demonstrate their courage and prowess in battle. They value honor, strength, and independence, walking the line between good and evil in the name of their three goddesses, the Maiden (Sehanine), the Mother (Melora), and the Crone (The Raven Queen). The legendary Wild Hunt is their creation. Firbolg clans are well known for pursuing oath-breakers with unmatched zeal.

The firbolg clan trapped in the labyrinth suffers the great insult of being prey in its own sacred hunting ground, stalked by fell beasts that have no honor. The Master of the Wild Hunt lies dead, along with many others. Homes have been razed or are occupied by minotaurs. Cabalists slay the firbolgs' game and waste the carcasses, claiming only the hearts for their wicked rituals. Worst of all, the Blood League presence taints the land and warps the demesne into a vampiric mockery of itself.

The firbolg have no permanent camp, but several small, temporary ones. They shift location regularly, which helps them stay away from the minotaurs.

Thanks to their familiarity with the landscape, the firbolgs know a secret that allows them to strike back. No matter how drastically the demesne changes, the ley lines remain, providing a highway of shortcuts to navigate the maze. Firbolgs are very possessive of this knowledge, because it is their only advantage.

If the heroes demonstrate their strength and honor, the firbolgs will form an alliance with them. The firbolgs become aware of the characters' presence as soon as the characters enter the maze.

Sherrok, Firbolg Moon Seer **Level 14 Controller**
Large fey humanoid XP 1,000

HP 141; **Bloodied** 70 **Initiative** +11
AC 28, **Fortitude** 26, **Reflex** 24, **Will** 27 **Perception** +18
Speed 8
Saving Throws +2 against charm effects and effects that immobilize, restrain, or slow

Traits

Regeneration
Sherrok regains 5 hit points whenever he starts his turn and has at least 1 hit point. When he takes necrotic damage, his regeneration does not function on his next turn.

Standard Actions

⊕ **Moon Mace** (radiant, weapon) ♦ **At-Will**
Attack: Melee 2 (one creature); +17 vs. Reflex
Hit: 2d10 + 8 radiant damage, and the target is blinded until the start of its next turn.

Ban of the Raven (necrotic) ♦ **Encounter**
Attack: Ranged 10 (one creature); +17 vs. Fortitude
Hit: 3d10 + 12 necrotic damage. In addition, attack rolls against the target can score critical hits on rolls of 18-20, and the target takes 10 extra necrotic damage from a critical hit (save ends both).
Aftereffect: Attack rolls against the target can score critical hits on rolls of 19-20 (save ends).
Miss: Half damage, and until the end of the target's next turn, attack rolls against it can score critical hits on rolls of 19-20.

Moonstrike (charm, psychic) ♦ **Recharge** ⚄ ⁞⁞
Attack: Close burst 5 (one creature in the burst affected by *moonfire*); +17 vs. Will
Hit: 3d10 + 7 psychic damage, and the target is dominated until the end of Sherrok's next turn.

Spirit Hounds ♦ **Recharge** when first bloodied
Attack: Close blast 5 (enemies in the blast); +17 vs. Reflex
Hit: 3d8 + 12 damage, and the target is slowed and cannot teleport (save ends both).

Minor Actions

Moonfire ♦ **Recharge** ⚅ ⚄ ⁞⁞
Attack: Ranged 10 (one creature); +17 vs. Will
Hit: Until the end of Sherrok's next turn, the target grants combat advantage to him and cannot benefit from invisibility or any concealment.

Skills Arcana +14, Athletics +15, Nature +18, Religion +14
Str 17 (+10) **Dex** 18 (+11) **Wis** 23 (+13)
Con 21 (+12) **Int** 14 (+9) **Cha** 15 (+9)
Alignment unaligned **Languages** Common, Elven
Equipment leather armor, mace, moon mask

Depending on how the heroes handle themselves, the clan members might become allies or adversaries. No firbolg will reveal the secret of the ley lines unless the heroes swear an oath to defeat the Blood League at any cost.

Since the demise of the Master of the Wild Hunt, the clan's moon seer, Sherrok, has borne the responsibility of leadership. He carefully weighs each decision, then acts with unyielding determination. He spends much of his time communing with the goddesses and performing rituals to break the minotaurs' influence over the land. He knows about the ley lines and comprehends the changing nature of the Feywild demesnes. If the adventurers gain an audience with Sherrok, they will be taken to him at the clan's camp.

Minotaurs of the Blood League

The Blood League minotaurs prowling the demesne are a bloodthirsty rabble of demon-worshiping butchers. All traditions that maintain organization in the league elsewhere have been abandoned in favor of hot-blooded slaughter in the twisting paths of the maze. The minotaurs mistakenly believe that the Animus Spire is a sign of Baphomet's approval, and they think the maze is a reflection of the Endless Maze in the Abyss. Takis, a shardhorn hunter and the group's de facto leader, encourages such delusions and frequently reminds his cabalists that the land's transformation occurred alongside his own (see Encounter 3 for Takis's stats). In truth, none of the cultists care where the maze came from or what fuels it. Their only concern is the release of the hunt. They are too distracted by their awe of the Animus Spire to notice the ley lines radiating from it.

Random Encounters

Once the heroes enter the shifting ways, check for random encounters every four to six hours, and any time the heroes travel from one location to another. To check for random encounters, roll a d10. An encounter occurs on a result of 1–7. Then either pick an appropriate encounter or roll a d8 to select one randomly.

1. Challenge of the Firbolg

Level 11 Encounter 3,100 XP

2 firbolg hounders (*Monster Manual 2*, page 108)
2 firbolg hunters (*Monster Manual 2*, page 108)
4 scarecrow shamblers (*Monster Manual* 3, page 168)

A firbolg hunting band wishes to test the heroes' mettle. They only fight to subdue and will relent when more than half their numbers are defeated. This can lead to an audience with Sherrok.

2. Cat and Mouse

Level 11 Encounter 3,400 XP

1 displacer beast pack lord (*Monster Vault*™, page 59)
2 savage displacer beasts (*Monster Vault*, page 58)
4 su ambushers (*Monster Manual* 3, page 189)

A pack of feral predators stalks the heroes through the shifting ways.

3. Mazed and Confused

Level 10 Encounter 2,950 XP

3 eladrin battle dancers (*Monster Vault*, page 115)
3 gnome entropists (*Monster Vault*, page 151)
2 human duelists (*Monster Vault*, page 173)

This beleaguered and paranoid band camps in a zone of perpetual dawn. They are all that remains of a larger force that set out from the nearest Feywild settlement.

4. Toil and Trouble

Level 12 Encounter 3,500 XP

1 green hag (*Monster Vault*, page 166)
2 scarecrow guardians (*Monster Manual* 3, page 169)
4 bough dryads (*Monster Vault*, page 93)

Sirens lead the heroes into the lair of a hungry hag. She may be willing to exchange information for favors or magic items if the heroes can convince her they are not worth cooking.

5. Winter's Embrace

Level 13 Encounter 4,100 XP

1 winterclaw owlbear (*Monster Vault*, page 237)
1 winter nymph (*Monster Manual* 3, page 152)
3 bough dryads (*Monster Vault*, page 93)

A sudden blast of winter accompanies an attack by these panicked denizens of the demesne. The change of season is local to the encounter area.

6. Of Course We're Firbolgs!

Level 10 Encounter 2,800 XP

1 verbeeg ringleader (*Monster Manual* 3, page 201)
3 verbeeg rowdies (*Monster Manual* 3, page 200)
4 cyclops guards (*Monster Vault*, page 38)

These conniving verbeegs try to pass themselves off as firbolgs long enough for their cloaked cyclops hirelings to get the drop on the heroes.

7. Slave to the Song

Level 12 Encounter 3,500 XP

1 thunderfury boar (see Encounter 1)
1 basilisk (*Monster Vault*, page 23)
2 drow venomblades (*Monster Vault*, page 116)

Siren song lures creatures from all directions into a chaotic battle.

8. Out for Blood

Level 13 Encounter 4,200 XP

2 pale bloodfiends (*Monster Manual* 3, page 140)
2 ironskin warriors (*Monster Manual* 3, page 141)
1 cinderhoof tramplers (*Monster Manual* 3, page 140)

Siren song attracts a Blood League hunting party that attempts to ambush the heroes.

Encounter 1: Belly of the Beast

Encounter Level 13 (4,200 XP)

Setup

2 feyspitter spiders
3 thunderfury boars

2 Feyspitter Spiders (S)	Level 7 Controller
Medium fey beast (spider)	XP 300 each
HP 80; **Bloodied** 40	**Initiative** +6
AC 21, **Fortitude** 19, **Reflex** 19, **Will** 18	**Perception** +5
Speed 6, climb 6 (spider climb)	Tremorsense 5
Standard Actions	
⊕ **Bite** (poison) ♦ **At-Will**	
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +12 vs. AC	
Hit: 1d6 + 7 damage, and ongoing 5 poison damage (save ends).	
Each Failed Saving Throw: The spider slides the target 3 squares.	
✧ **Poison Spittle** (poison) ♦ **At-Will**	
Attack: Close blast 3 (creatures in blast); +10 vs. Will	
Hit: Ongoing 10 poison damage (save ends).	
Each Failed Saving Throw: The spider slides the target 3 squares.	
Triggered Actions	
Fey Leap (teleportation) ♦ **Recharge** ⚄ ⚅	
Trigger: An enemy hits the spider with a melee attack.	
Effect (Immediate Interrupt): The spider teleports 3 squares.	
Skills Acrobatics +11	
Str 13 (+4) **Dex** 16 (+6) **Wis** 14 (+5)	
Con 16 (+6) **Int** 7 (+1) **Cha** 11 (+3)	
Alignment unaligned **Languages** –	

3 Thunderfury Boars (B)	Level 15 Brute
Large fey beast	XP 1,200 each
HP 182; **Bloodied** 91	**Initiative** +9
AC 27, **Fortitude** 29, **Reflex** 25, **Will** 24	**Perception** +8
Speed 8	
Traits	
Thunderous Charge (thunder)	
The thunderfury boar's charge attacks deal 10 extra thunder damage.	
Standard Actions	
⊕ **Gore** ♦ **At-Will**	
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +20 vs. AC	
Hit: 3d8 + 10 damage, or 4d8 + 10 while the thunderfury boar is bloodied.	
✧ **Thunderfury** (thunder) ♦ **Recharge** ⚄ ⚅	
Attack: Close burst 2 (enemies in the burst); +18 vs. Fortitude	
Hit: 3d10 + 10 thunder damage, and the target falls prone.	
Miss: Half damage.	
Triggered Actions	
↯ **Death Strike** ♦ **Encounter**	
Trigger: The thunderfury boar drops to 0 hit points.	
Effect (Immediate Interrupt): The thunderfury boar uses *gore*. If the attack hits, the thunderfury boar pushes the target up to 2 squares and knocks it prone.	
Str 24 (+14) **Dex** 15 (+9) **Wis** 12 (+8)	
Con 22 (+13) **Int** 5 (+4) **Cha** 9 (+6)	
Alignment unaligned **Languages** –	

Though the heroes might at first find the shifting ways wondrous, this encounter introduces the true danger of being trapped in the maze.

Firbolg hunters incensed a trio of thunderfury boars and unleashed them to hunt the heroes. They shadow the growing conflict to discern the heroes' might and temperament before challenging them face-to-face. Meanwhile, siren song lures the heroes onward, and the maze pursues them into the ruin of an ancient fey cathedral. The maze chases one of the boars out of hiding to incite a confrontation.

After the heroes wander the maze's shifting paths a while, they hear something fast approaching through the brush alongside the path.

When the heroes react to the sounds, read:

A battered gnome plunges out of the undergrowth, his jerkin red with fresh blood. His scratched face is pained, and his eyes stretch wide with terror.

"Run!" he cries as he sprints toward you. Behind him, the rustle of foliage heralds a grasping tide of carnivorous vegetation that blocks passage and threatens to devour everything in its path.

After the heroes react to the gnome, read:

An alluring fey maiden turns the corner down an intersecting path, singing a calming lullaby. Her smile is enchanting, and she seems to know an escape route. Waves of foliage threaten to engulf you from behind while the mysterious maiden's soothing song promises sanctuary ahead.

Two other thunderfury boars already found the ruins. One near the cathedral's entryway readies a *thunderous charge*. The other waits in ambush inside a cluster of massive shrubs. Two feyspitter spiders live in the cathedral, drawn by an energy node concealed beneath thick layers of webbing in one corner of the ruins. They perch on remaining sections of the cathedral balcony.

When the heroes reach the clearing, read:

An overgrown stone dome stretches through the treetops high above this ancient, abandoned place of worship, now cradled in a wilderness embrace. Most of this once-grand structure has crumbled to the foundation, leaving only the northern chambers, a few wall segments, and two crumbled staircases. The rest is leaf, vine, and shadow.

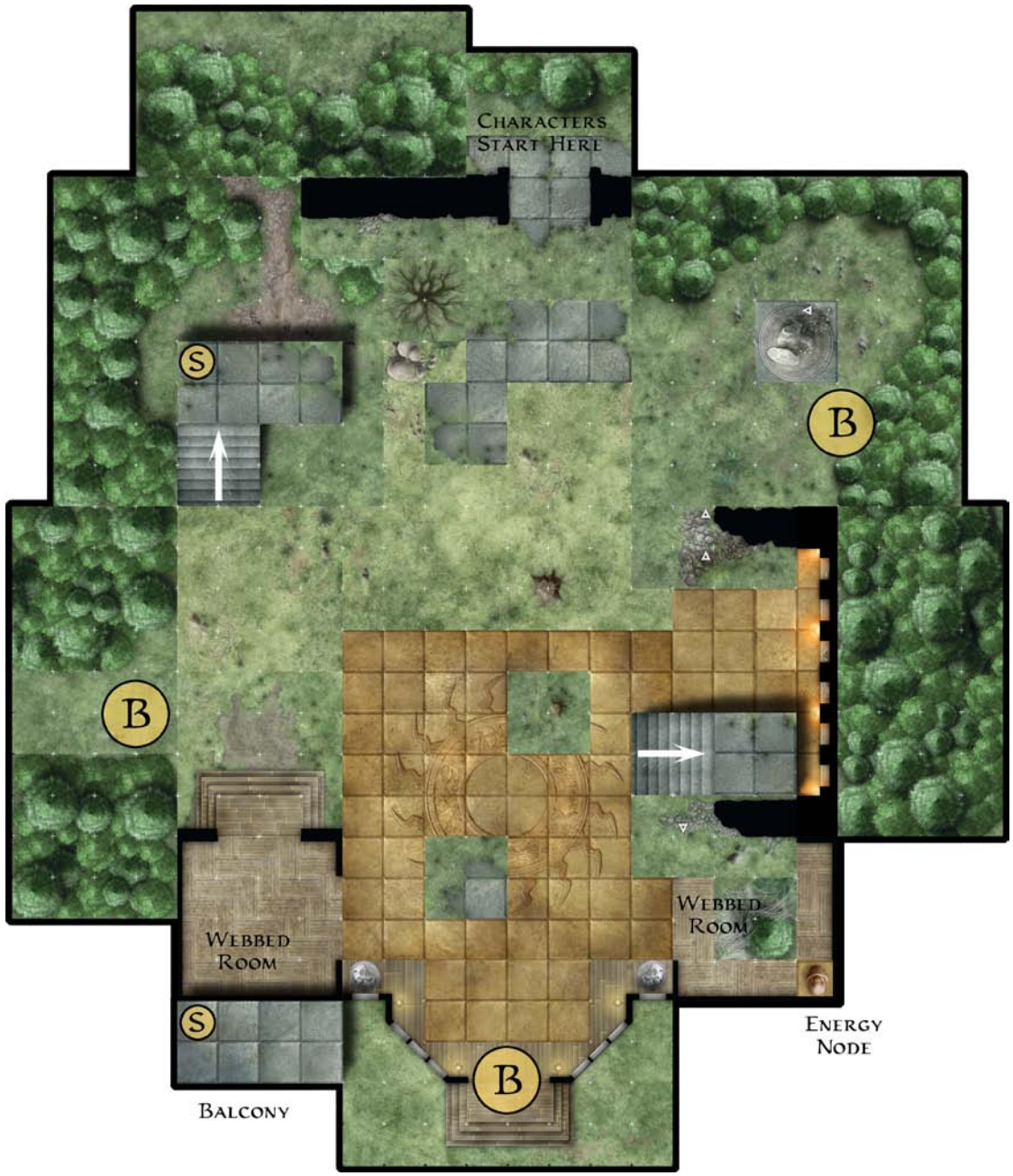
The beleaguered gnome crumples to the ground, tripped by a writhing vine. He reaches out to you and yells for help but his cry is quickly silenced. The shocked look on his face distorts as the forest's hungry tendrils slither under his skin. Foliage swarms over him, and the gnome is no more.

A thundering roar accompanies the pounding of hooves when an enormous boar bolts out of a separate path, charging at you.

The maze becomes dormant after enveloping the gnome, trapping everyone in the ruined cathedral. Once battle is joined, the siren quits the field, fading into the forest along with her song.

Tactics

With *thunderous charge*, the thunderfury boar at the cathedral entrance engages the first hero to reach the clearing. The boar pursued by the maze attacks anyone in its path. It tries to bull rush prey into the grab grass before unleashing *thunderfury*. The stalking boar waits until all creatures are trapped in the clearing, then breaks cover with *thunderous charge*. Although the boars are not particularly intelligent, they are familiar with their environment and instinctively make the most of the terrain (see "Features of the Area"). Otherwise, the boars use *thunderfury* as often as possible and pursue fleeing enemies with no regard for opportunity attacks.



The feyspitter spiders wait to attack until all creatures are involved in fighting the boars. Each employs hit-and-run tactics, rarely focusing on one opponent for more than a round. They use *bite* to poison individual foes and *poison spittle* against groups. If any creature approaches within 3 squares of the energy node, both spiders move to defend their arcane treasure at all cost. When they are given the opportunity, the spiders slide prey into one of the terrain features.

Development

Firbolgs observe the battle from afar, concealed by the forest. With a successful DC 20 Perception check, heroes notice large humanoid figures hiding in the trees. The figures depart when the last monster falls, and they refuse to interact with the heroes at this time.

One web conceals an energy node (see "Features of the Area"). The other web hides a +3 *feyslaughter weapon*.

Features of the Area

Balcony Remnant: A few walls of this once-magnificent structure still stand, rising 10 feet to the balcony floor. Creatures can climb to the balcony with a DC 20 Athletics check.

Cathedral Foundation: Squares containing the cathedral's foundation and former walls are difficult terrain.

Energy Node: The energy node is the only remaining vestige of the site's former power. A shimmer in the air reveals the energy node's presence. Once during a 24-hour period, a creature that starts its turn in the energy node's square can spend a minor action to regain the use of an encounter attack power, depleting the energy node for the day.

Grab Grass: Grab grass covers the steps of both ruined staircases (but not the landings at the tops of the stairs) and grows in every ground-level square adjacent to those staircases. A creature that falls prone in the grass must make a DC 14 Athletics check to stand up.

Maze Wall: Everything beyond the confines of the map is impenetrable maze wall.

Rubble: Squares of rubble are difficult terrain.

Ruined Staircases: Staircase squares are difficult terrain.

Spider Web: Spider webs fill two separate rooms of the cathedral. Webs are difficult terrain and provide partial concealment. Creatures entering the web must make a DC 14 Acrobatics or Athletics check or become immobilized. Trapped creatures can use the escape action to free themselves. One web hides a +3 *feyslaughter weapon* (*Adventurer's Vault*, page 68). The other covers an energy node.

Concluding the Encounter

After combat, the heroes can take an extended rest in the shelter of the ruins. If they do, they wake to find a path out of the clearing that formed during the night. Alternatively, the heroes can attempt to hack through the living maze to find the nearest path. In that case, calculate their overland movement as if all characters are slowed, and each hero loses a healing surge battling the carnivorous vegetation.

When this encounter ends, the Stalking Shadows skill challenge begins.

Skill Challenge: Stalking Shadows

This skill challenge occurs over a period of exploration interspersed with random encounters.

The instances when skills can be used are indicated in each skill's description. Try to reward players if they come up with creative ways to gather information that go beyond the guidelines below. It might be worth reminding players that a great deal of knowledge can be gleaned if heroes question some of the creatures in the maze rather than killing everything they meet. Wariness is prudent in such a dangerous place, but not everything here is out to kill the characters.

By the conclusion of the skill challenge, the heroes will understand that they are being hunted for sport, but they might suspect the wrong group of hunters.

Level: 12 (2,100 XP).

Complexity: 3 (requires 8 successes before 3 failures).

Primary Skills: Arcana, Diplomacy, Heal, Nature, Religion.

Arcana (DC 20; 2 successes maximum): Knowledge of the Feywild provides a clue. Arcana can be used at the end of a short rest or an extended rest or after a fight against minotaurs. Failure indicates that a clue is misinterpreted, implicating a Feywild native and not the minotaurs.

Diplomacy (DC 20; 3 successes maximum): The heroes acquire clues through peaceful interaction with other creatures in the maze. Diplomacy can be used when talking to other creatures met in the maze, but only if the characters haven't fought them. Perhaps giving the firbolgs a hunting trophy earns the tribe's respect; reveling with satyrs loosens their

tongues; or plying banshrae with song gains their temporary compliance. Failure indicates the heroes accidentally start a brawl, so that all characters lose a healing surge in addition to recording a failure in the challenge. Alternatively, failure on this check can initiate a combat encounter

Heal (DC 28; 2 successes maximum): Examining carcasses and hunting trophies reveals something about what killed the creatures. Heal can be used when characters find corpses that were killed by someone other than the characters. You can create specific encounters of this type or allow a Heal check after a short rest or an extended rest. Someone notices that many of the corpses they find were trampled and gored, suggesting the attacker was bovine. Some bodies bear axe wounds, suggesting a sentient attacker. Failure indicates that a clue is misinterpreted, implicating a fey creature.

Intimidate (DC 20; 3 successes maximum): The heroes acquire clues through interrogation or a show of strength. Intimidate can be used when talking to other creatures met in the maze, before or after fighting them. Perhaps a defeated hag offers scrying rituals in exchange for her life; a properly displayed trophy impresses the firbolg; or a show of magical prowess catches the attention of a power-hungry lamia.

Nature: (DC 20; 3 successes maximum): Knowledge of the natural world's denizens reveals the true threat. Nature can be used at the end of a short rest or an extended rest, or when heroes find corpses in the maze. Heroes find tufts of bovine hair or a piece of chipped horn. The brutality of the hunt, the stalker's ability to navigate the maze, and other evidence suggests minotaur involvement. Failure on this check indicates that the heroes mistake minotaur signs for those of satyrs or centaurs.

Religion (DC 20; 2 successes maximum): Heroes recognize the mark of Baphomet among the bodies and hunting trophies. Religion can be used when characters find corpses in the maze. Hearts have been ritualistically removed from many of the victims, suggesting the involvement of the Blood League.

Secondary Skills: Insight, Perception

Insight (DC 20): The hero discovers another way to consider evidence. Insight can be used whenever a skill check is allowed in this challenge. The first success with this skill eliminates one failure accrued during the challenge. Further successes provide a +2 bonus to the next Diplomacy, Intimidate, or Religion check in the challenge.

Perception (DC 20): The character spies a better piece of evidence, allowing the heroes to reevaluate a previous mistake. Perception can be used whenever a skill check is allowed in this challenge. The first success with this skill eliminates one failure accrued during the challenge. Further successes provide a +2 bonus to the next Arcana, Heal, or Nature check in the challenge.

Success: The heroes turn the tables on the Blood League hunting party that has been stalking them, catching them by surprise on a ruined bridge that spans a vast crystal chasm.

Failure: The Blood League hunters plant false trails and misleading clues to stay one step ahead of the heroes, leading them into an ambush on a ruined bridge over a crystal chasm.

Encounter 2: Hunters Hunted

Encounter Level 12 (3,800 XP)

Setup

1 arcane tempest hazard
1 minotaur magus (M)
2 demonic savage minotaurs (D)
4 minotaur soldiers (S)

Arcane Tempest Terrain	Level 13 Hazard XP 800
Detect automatic	**Initiative** +6
Immune attacks	
Traits	
Mesmeric Aurora (charm, zone)	
The zone covers the entire bridge. Any creature that can see that ends its turn in the zone is dazed (save ends). A creature can be dazed only once by the zone.	
Downpour	
Until the storm passes, all squares inside it are lightly obscured by heavy rain.	
Standard Actions	
Attack (lightning, teleportation, thunder) ♦ **At-Will**	
Attack: Ranged special (one creature on the bridge); +16 vs. Reflex	
Hit: 2d10 + 10 lightning and thunder damage, and the target is teleported 1d4 squares in a random direction.	
Miss: Half damage, and the target slides 1 square in a random direction.	

Minotaur Magus (M) Medium natural humanoid	Level 9 Controller (Leader) XP 400
HP 96; **Bloodied** 48	**Initiative** +5
AC 23, **Fortitude** 21, **Reflex** 20, **Will** 23	**Perception** +12
Speed 6	
Traitss	
Unleash the Beast Within ♦ **Aura** 3	
Any ally that starts its turn in the aura gains a +2 power bonus to attack rolls and damage rolls on attacks made as part of charges until the end of that ally's turn.	
Standard Actions	
Glaive ♦ **At-Will**	
Attack: Melee 2 (one creature); +14 vs. AC	
Hit: 2d4 + 10 damage, and the magus slides the target up to 2 squares.	
Miss: The magus can slide the target 1 square.	
Baphomet's Rage (charm, psychic) ♦ **At-Will**	
Attack: Ranged 10 (one creature); +12 vs. Will	
Hit: 1d6 + 4 psychic damage, and the target uses a free action to charge a creature of the magus's choosing.	
Crimson Bolt (fire, lightning) ♦ **Recharge** ⚄ ⁞⁞	
Attack: Ranged 20 (one creature); +12 vs. Reflex	
Hit: 2d10 + 5 lightning damage, and the target takes ongoing 5 fire damage and cannot shift (save ends both).	
Triggered Actions	
Goring Fling ♦ **At-Will**	
Trigger: An enemy adjacent to the magus deals damage to the magus.	
Attack (Immediate Reaction): Melee 1 (triggering enemy); +12 vs. Fortitude	
Hit: 1d6 + 4 damage, and the magus pushes the target up to 3 squares.	
Skills Bluff +14, Insight +12	
Str 18 (+8) **Dex** 12 (+5) **Wis** 16 (+7)	
Con 16 (+7) **Int** 15 (+6) **Cha** 20 (+9)	
Alignment chaotic evil **Languages** Abyssal, Common	

2 Demonic Savage Minotaurs (D) Large natural humanoid	Level 11 Brute XP 600 each
HP 140; **Bloodied** 70	**Initiative** +8
AC 23, **Fortitude** 25, **Reflex** 22, **Will** 20	**Perception** +7
Speed 8	
Standard Actions	
Claws ♦ **At-Will**	
Attack: Melee 2 (one or two creatures); +16 vs. AC. If the minotaur targets only one creature, it can make this attack twice against that creature.	
Hit: 2d6 + 5 damage, and the minotaur grabs the target (escape DC 19) if it has fewer than two creatures grabbed.	
Impale ♦ **At-Will**	
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature grabbed by the minotaur); +14 vs. Fortitude	
Hit: 5d8 + 13 damage. The target falls prone and is no longer grabbed by the minotaur.	
Triggered Actions	
Goring Assault ♦ **At-Will**	
Trigger: An enemy within 10 squares of the minotaur hits it with a ranged or area attack.	
Effect (Immediate Reaction): The minotaur charges the triggering enemy.	
Str 22 (+11) **Dex** 16 (+8) **Wis** 15 (+7)	
Con 20 (+10) **Int** 5 (+2) **Cha** 7 (+3)	
Alignment chaotic evil **Languages** Abyssal, Common	

4 Minotaur Soldiers (S)	Level 8 Soldier
Medium natural humanoid	XP 350 each
HP 89; **Bloodied** 44	**Initiative** +8
AC 24, **Fortitude** 22, **Reflex** 19, **Will** 19	**Perception** +11
Speed 6	
Standard Actions	
⊕ **Battleaxe** (weapon) ♦ **At-Will**	
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +13 vs. AC	
Hit: 1d10 + 8 damage, and the minotaur uses shield bash against the same target.	
Minor Actions	
⸸ **Shield Bash** ♦ **At-Will** (1/round)	
Requirement: The minotaur must be using a shield.	
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +11 vs. Fortitude	
Hit: 1d6 damage, and the target falls prone.	
Triggered Actions	
⸸ **Goring Toss** ♦ **At-Will**	
Trigger: An enemy adjacent to the minotaur shifts.	
Attack (Immediate Interrupt): Melee 1 (triggering enemy); +11 vs. Reflex	
Hit: 1d6 + 5 damage, the target is immobilized until the end of its turn, and the minotaur slides the target up to 2 squares to a square adjacent to the minotaur.	
Str 20 (+9) **Dex** 14 (+6) **Wis** 14 (+6)	
Con 17 (+7) **Int** 10 (+4) **Cha** 13 (+5)	
Alignment unaligned **Languages** Common	
Equipment heavy shield, battleaxe	

The outcome of the Stalking Shadows skill challenge determines whether the heroes ambush the minotaurs or vice versa. Either way, the ambush happens on an overgrown stone bridge that spans more than 100 feet across a sparkling crystal chasm 70 feet deep. The bridge is more fragile than it looks, and the approaching eldritch storm threatens to sunder it forever.

When the heroes reach the bridge, read:

Myriad hues sparkle from every inch of the crystalline chasm, reflecting ominous flashes of lightning from the impending storm. The chasm drops some 70 feet into darkness, spanned only by an overgrown stone bridge cluttered with rubble. On one edge of the bridge near its center squats a ruined guard tower. One corner of the tower has crumbled away, and something glints within the shadowed interior. Centuries ago, the bridge and its tower must have been part of a great trade road, for two wagons could easily traverse it abreast. Now it is little more than a desolate husk battered by the howling wind.

The minotaur magus holes up with two of the minotaur soldiers in the tower. One soldier looks through a spyglass while the other takes a position outside the door. If the minotaurs ambush the heroes, the other minotaurs hide in the rubble from the bridge's many fallen columns. If the heroes ambush the minotaurs, all enemies occupy the same positions but they are mesmerized by the fury of the oncoming storm and can easily be surprised.

Arcana Check DC 20: The character senses the magical nature of the storm and understands that its lightning strikes might have unusual effects.

Tactics

The minotaur magus remains at his vigil in the tower, where he has a panoramic view of the battlefield. He sticks to ranged attacks, relying on his two bodyguards to keep enemies at bay. The minotaur soldiers in the tower focus on defense and work together to keep attackers away from the magus. Each soldier on the bridge teams up with a demonic savage minotaur, attempting to knock opponents prone with *shield bash* and set them up for the savage's *claw* attacks. The demonic savage minotaurs try to grab and impale enemies within reach. All minotaurs capitalize on the magus's aura when possible, taking position within it before launching charge attacks.

The arcane tempest sweeps over the battlefield, rolling initiative at the beginning of combat. After attacking each creature and each unstable bridge square once, the storm passes.

Development

The Collapsing Bridge: When the last unstable bridge square crumbles, the bridge collapses, and the guard tower breaks away and smashes onto the chasm floor. Any creatures inside can make a DC 20 Athletics check as an immediate interrupt to leap to the relative safety of the bridge. Alternatively, a creature in the tower can attempt a saving throw to keep itself from falling, landing prone on the edge of the bridge.

At the end of the next round, one end of the bridge (a wall 12 area, or two contiguous rows of 6 squares each) plummets into the chasm. The collapse affects two more rows of squares at the end of each turn. Any creature in the area of the collapse can attempt a saving throw to catch itself. Successful landbound creatures fall prone in an unoccupied space at the edge of the collapse. Flying creatures can take wing rather than fall. Failure indicates the creature falls 70 feet to the chasm floor.

The First Ley Line: Any character succeeding on a DC 20 Perception check notices that the chasm remains unaffected when the maze changes. A successful DC 20 Arcana check reveals that the chasm is a ley line. Further knowledge about ley lines and their

role in forming Feywild demesnes can be gained with further Arcana checks, by speaking with Sherrok at the firbolg camp, or by interacting with other fey creatures in the maze.

Features of the Area

Illumination: The area is dimly lit by the storm's aurora.

Chasm: Rough crystal walls meet the chasm floor 70 feet below the bridge. Boulders and sharp crystals are scattered amid centuries' worth of gravel and dust.

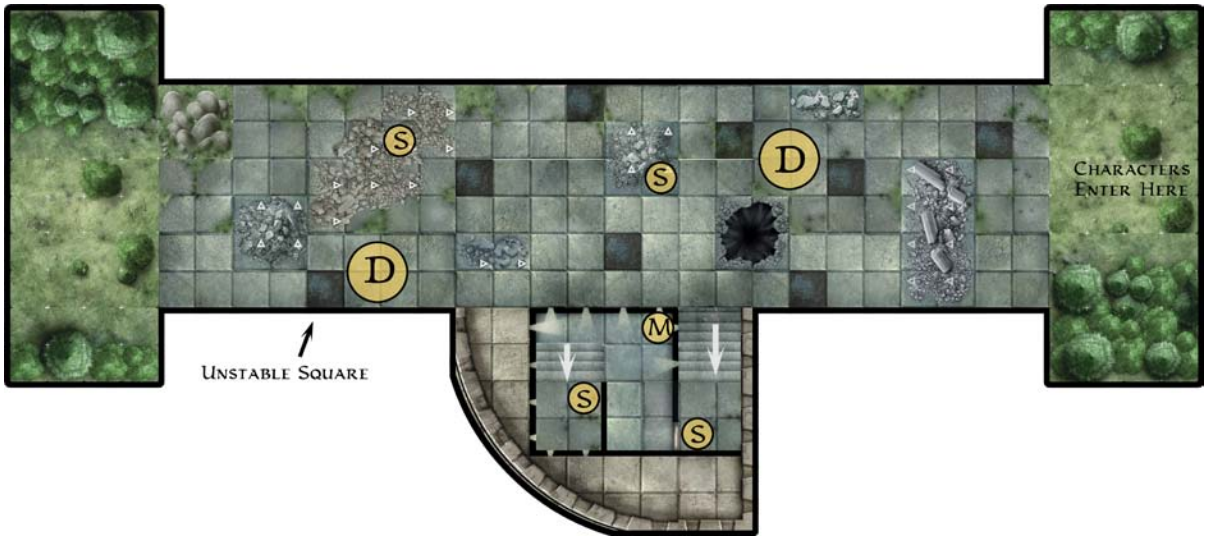
Guard Tower: This tower was added long after the bridge's original construction, by another civilization. The wooden door has rotted away, and one corner of the tower has crumbled to rubble. The roof is still intact, providing superior cover from the arcane tempest's attacks. An ornate spyglass worth 1,000 gp sits on its tripod atop a raised platform inside. The interior of the guard tower is shrouded in darkness, providing creatures inside with total concealment. All squares of the guard tower interior are difficult terrain.

Holes: Where there is a hole in the bridge, treat the square as hindering terrain. A Medium or smaller creature can't occupy a hole square unless it is flying, levitating, or supporting itself some other way; otherwise, it falls through the hole. Creatures can jump over holes normally.

Rubble: Squares of rubble are difficult terrain.

Stairs: The guard tower staircase is difficult terrain.

Unstable Square: When a nonflying creature enters an unstable square on the bridge, the stone crumbles and falls into the chasm below. The triggering creature can attempt a DC 14 Acrobatics or Athletics check. Success indicates that the creature can continue its movement normally. Failure indicates that the creature falls prone in the last space it occupied before entering the unstable square. In either case, the unstable square becomes a hole through the bridge deck.



Concluding the Encounter

With the minotaur threat confirmed and at least an inkling of the ley line mystery unraveled, the heroes are much closer to ending the Blood League's hold over the demesne. An immense amount of the maze remains to be explored and cleared of the vile Blood League. Alternatively, the heroes might go straight for the demesne core to find the source of its corruption.

Whatever they choose, their proximity to the ley lines results in frequent siren attacks and much greater resistance from the maze. Minotaur hunting packs respond to siren song, increasing the chance for battles with the Blood League. Eventually, the heroes will find the Animus Spire.

While the heroes explore, the maze tries to keep them away from its heart. When the heroes reach the clearing, proceed with Encounter 3.

Encounter 3: The Animus Spire

Encounter Level 14 (5,400 XP)

Setup

1 frenzied horde hazard
1 treant (T)
2 bough dryads (D)
Takis, unique shardhorn hunter (S)

Frenzied Horde Terrain	Level 13 Hazard 800 XP
Detect automatic	**Initiative** –
Immune attacks	
Traits	
Muffling Cacophony	
While within 5 squares of the spire, any creature gains resist 10 thunder.	
Triggered Actions	
Attack ♦ **At-Will**	
Trigger: A creature (other than Takis, the treant, or the bough dryads) enters a square within 5 squares of the spire or ends its turn there.	
Attack (Opportunity Action): Close burst 5 centered on the spire (triggering creature in the burst); +16 vs. Reflex	
Hit: 2d8 + 12 damage, and the target is pushed 1 square away from the spire.	
Miss: The target is pushed 1 square away from the spire.	
Countermeasures	
♦ **Delay:** A blast or burst attack that causes damage clears the horde from the attack's area of effect until the end of the attacker's next turn.	

Treant (T) Huge fey magical beast (plant)	Level 16 Elite Controller XP 2,800
HP 316; **Bloodied** 158	**Initiative** +9
AC 30, **Fortitude** 30, **Reflex** 26, **Will** 30	**Perception** +15
Speed 8 (forest walk)	Low-light vision
Saving Throws +2; **Action Points** 1	
Traits	
☼ **Grasping Roots** ♦ **Aura** 3	
Squares in the aura are difficult terrain for nonflying enemies.	
Wooden Body	
Whenever the treant takes fire damage, it also takes ongoing 5 fire damage (save ends).	
Standard Actions	
⊕ **Slam** ♦ **At-Will**	
Attack: Melee 3 (one creature); +21 vs. AC	
Hit: 2d10 + 13 damage.	
✲ **Awaken Forest** (zone) ♦ **At-Will**	
Attack: Area burst 3 within 10 (enemies in the burst); +21 vs. AC	
Hit: 2d10 + 9 damage.	
Effect: The burst creates a zone of difficult terrain that lasts until the end of the encounter or until the treant uses this power again.	
✧ **Earthshaking Stomp** ♦ **Recharge** if the power misses every target	
Attack: Close burst 2 (creatures in the burst); +19 vs. Fortitude	
Hit: 6d6 + 7 damage, and the target falls prone.	
Str 24 (+15) **Dex** 12 (+9) **Wis** 25 (+15)	
Con 22 (+14) **Int** 14 (+10) **Cha** 12 (+9)	
Alignment unaligned **Languages** Elven	

Takis, Shardhorn Hunter (S) Medium natural humanoid, minotaur	Level 15 Lurker XP 1,200
HP 116; **Bloodied** 58	**Initiative** +17
AC 29, **Fortitude** 27, **Reflex** 28, **Will** 26	**Perception** +13
Speed 8	**Darkvision**
Standard Actions	
⊕ **Horn Dagger** (weapon) ♦ **At-Will**	
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +20 vs. AC	
Hit: 4d4 + 10 damage.	
⸸ **Backstab** (weapon) ♦ **At-Will**	
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature granting combat advantage to Takis); +20 vs. AC	
Hit: 4d4 + 10 damage, and ongoing 10 damage (save ends).	
⸸ **Goring Charge** ♦ **At-Will**	
Effect: Takis charges and makes the following attack in place of a melee basic attack.	
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +21 vs. AC	
Hit: 2d10 + 10 damage, and the target falls prone.	
Move Actions	
Heart of the Unicorn (illusion, teleportation) ♦ **Recharge** when Takis uses *backstab*	
Effect: Takis teleports up to 6 squares and becomes invisible until the end of its next turn or until it makes a melee attack roll.	
Triggered Actions	
⸸ **Shardhorn Ferocity** ♦ **Encounter**	
Trigger: The hunter drops to 0 hit points.	
Effect (Immediate Interrupt): The hunter uses *horn dagger*. If the attack hits, the target is dazed until the end of the target's next turn.	
Skills Intimidate +17, Stealth +18	
Str 23 (+13) **Dex** 23 (+13) **Wis** 23 (+13)	
Con 20 (+12) **Int** 20 (+12) **Cha** 20 (+12)	
Alignment evil **Languages** Common	
Equipment *chameleon ring*, unicorn horn dagger	

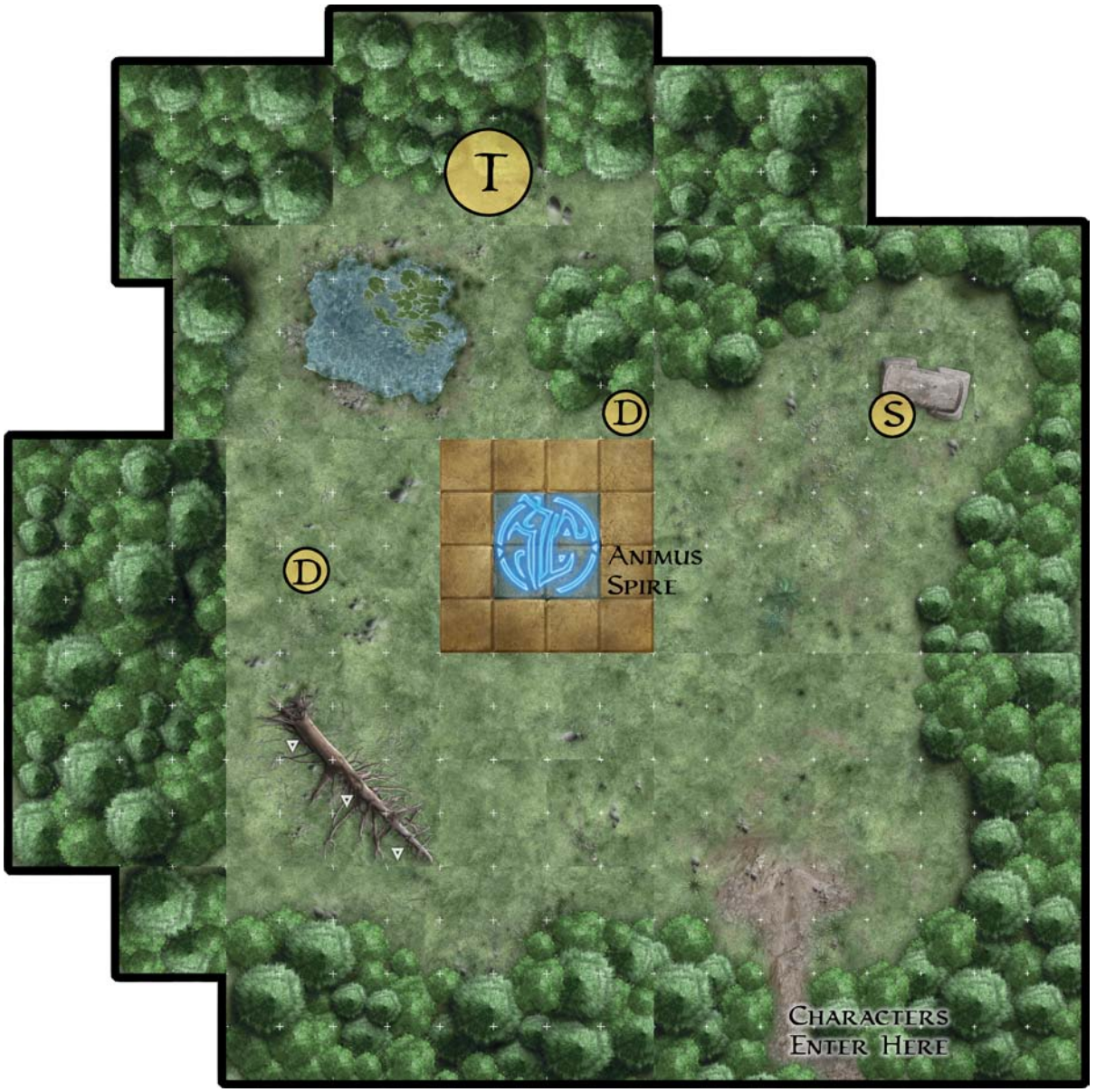
2 Bough Dryads	Level 15 Minion Skirmisher
Medium fey humanoid (plant)	XP 300 each
HP 1; a missed attack never damages a minion.	**Initiative** +16
AC 29, **Fortitude** 28, **Reflex** 28, **Will** 26	**Perception** +17
Speed 8 (forest walk)	
Standard Actions	
⊕ **Claw ♦ At-Will**	
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +20 vs. AC	
Hit: 11 damage, or 13 if no other enemy is adjacent to the dryad.	
Triggered Actions	
Boon of Life ♦ Encounter	
Trigger: The dryad drops to 0 hit points.	
Effect (No Action): Close burst 5 (one ally in the burst). The target gains 5 temporary hit points.	
Str 21 (+12) **Dex** 24 (+14)	**Wis** 21 (+12)
Con 24 (+14) **Int** 11 (+7)	**Cha** 17 (+10)
Alignment unaligned **Languages** Elven	

As the heroes approach the Animus Spire from afar, read:

An ear-piercing shriek swells and harmonizes with a constant rumbling roar as you approach the unearthly glow of a 200-foot-tall spike of crystal and stone. A churning tornado of blurred shapes swarms the spire, and the cloying perfume of overgrown blossoms and pollen intensifies the stench of rot and blood.

When the heroes reach the clearing, read:

The mad, unearthly cacophony resolves into hundreds of frenzied cries. Birds, beasts, and all manner of creatures fill the clearing in a violent swarm, tearing into each other in a bloody free-for-all that reaches the skies. Plant life has grown to extraordinary proportions here, giving off a disorienting cloud of shimmering pollen that irritates the eyes and flesh.



Although the shardhorn hunter prepares for a sacrifice, he is expecting the heroes and cannot be caught off guard. Before combat begins, he takes a position near the altar at the edge of the obscuring pollen cloud and makes a Stealth check to hide.

The treant lurks near the murky water of the pond. Two bough dryads flank the Animus Spire. They have all been driven mad by the Blood League's influence over the demesne and are eager to enter the fray.

Nature Check DC 14: These creatures exhibit unnatural outbursts of rage. They are beyond reason, and attempts to calm them probably will only provoke them further.

Tactics

The shardhorn hunter slips on his *chameleon ring* (see below) and sneaks into position for *goring charge*. On his next turn, he uses *heart of the unicorn* in preparation for using *backstab* against a different target. He repeats the sequence of *heart of the unicorn* and *backstab* as often as possible.

The treant moves to gain line of sight and activates *awaken forest* before moving within melee reach. If flanked or surrounded, it uses *earthshaking stomp*. The bough dryads focus their attacks on enemies damaged by the frenzied horde and hindered by the treant's *grasping roots*.

Features of the Area

The Animus Spire: This magically formed, gem-encrusted obelisk stands as blocking terrain 20 feet on a side, reaching 200 feet at the apex. As the intersection of all the demesne's ley lines, the spire constantly glows and pulses with arcane energy, shedding bright light in a 50-foot radius. Arcane attack powers used in that radius gain a +2 bonus to their attack rolls.

Altar: The rough, bloodstained stone slabs forming the ancient altar stand 3 feet tall. It can provide partial cover for Medium and Small creatures. The altar's square is difficult terrain.

Fallen Tree: The area of the fallen tree is difficult terrain.

Pollen Cloud: The flood of arcane energy from the Animus Spire has stirred up pollen from the overstimulated vegetation. Massive shimmering tufts float in a cloud, refracting the glow of the Animus Spire and blanketing the area in a dreamlike snow. All squares within 5 of the Animus Spire are lightly obscured. If any creature uses a radiant power while in the pollen cloud's area of effect, all creatures in a burst 1 around the radiant effect's origin square are blinded (save ends), including the creature activating the power.

Pond: The pond is shallow and murky from moss and mud. It is difficult terrain and provides total concealment for submerged creatures.

Treasure: Takis wears a *chameleon ring* (*Adventurer's Vault*, page 156). Amid the bodies littering the clearing, the heroes can find 400 gold pieces worth of various coins and semiprecious stones, as well as an ornate crown worth 2,500 gold pieces and a matching scepter worth 1,500 gold.

Concluding the Adventure

The moment Takis dies, the demesne reverts to its former form: a lush, tangled forest attuned to the firbolgs. Surviving creatures return to their lairs to lick their wounds, the sentient among them contemplating what the demesne showed them of their darker natures. Not only can the firbolgs reclaim their homes and rebuild, but proper order is also restored to their sacred hunting ground. To express the clan's gratitude, Sherrok vows to aid the heroes if they ever need assistance from the firbolgs.

With no further obligations in the demesne, the heroes can continue to explore the Feywild, or they can return to the natural world, or travel to some other place by any means at their disposal.

It is possible for all the firbolgs to die in the course of the adventure. In that case, the demesne attunes itself to the heroes, While this outcome provides them with their own small Feywild demesne, they will need to hold it against covetous outsiders and denizens alike, and heroes have a dangerous habit of attracting attention to themselves.

About the Author

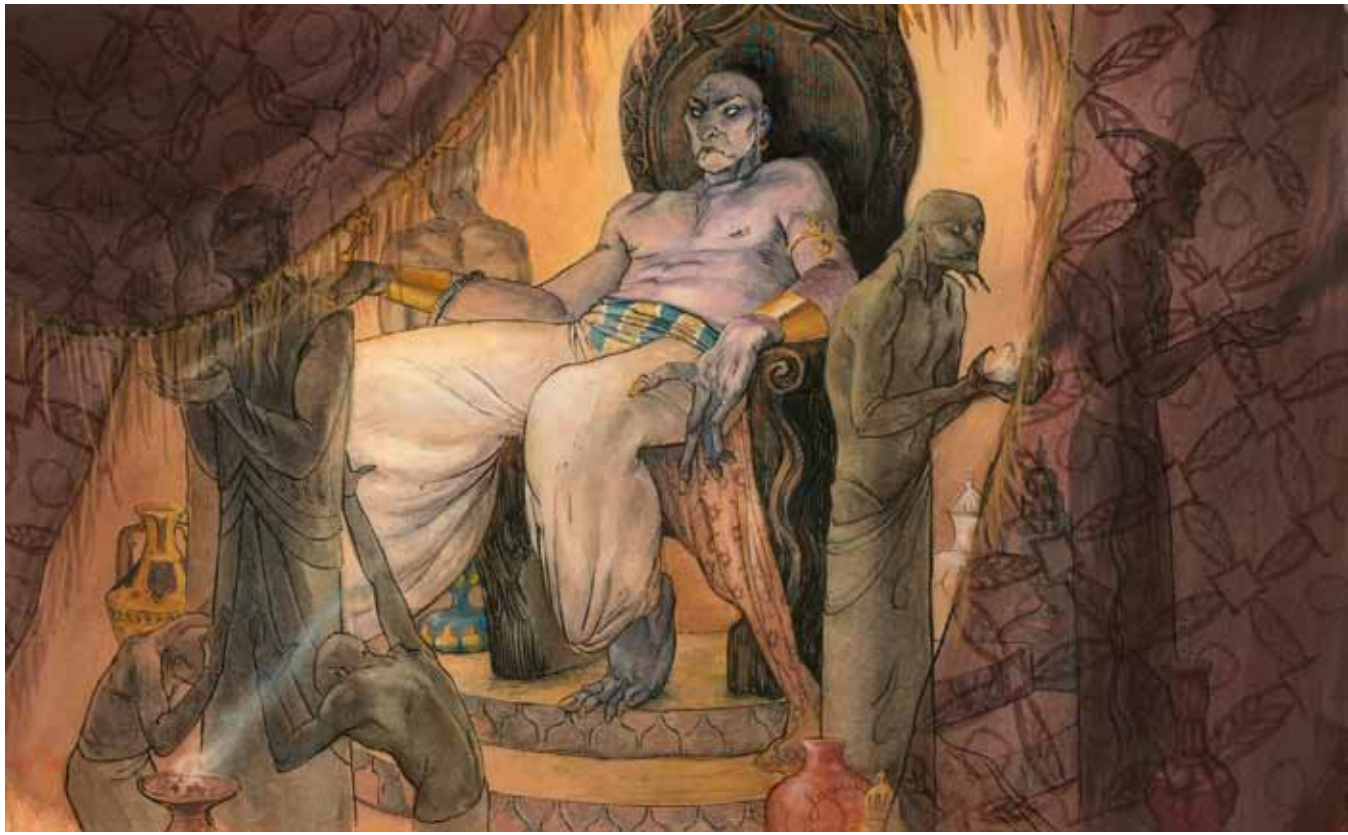
D. Jason Wofford fell in love with roleplaying games at the tender age of eight when his older brother brought home a red box containing the Dungeons & Dragons *Basic Rules*. The chemistry was undeniable, and Jason's affair with D&D continues to this day (although he admittedly sees other games on the side). He lives, writes, games, and rocks in lovely Lawrence, Kansas with his feline familiar, Nicodemus, and three wonderful guitars.

The Pavilion of Wonders

Mihajla's Tent

By Cameron Burry ✦ Illustration by Bernadette Carstensen

Mihajla is a wisecracking djinn from the Elemental Chaos who has a penchant for gambling. Though he is no less powerful than the average djinn, he doesn't share his race's lust for power. Instead of fighting or seeking conquest or status, Mihajla prefers to spend his time looking for adversaries to compete against him in games of chance. He seldom uses his impressive power for anything other than maintaining his pavilion of wonders and surrounding himself with luxury.



"Mihajla's Tent" is a setting in which characters can have a wide range of encounters. The "opponent" is a level 25 djinn, but because the encounter is unlikely to devolve into combat, it is suitable for characters of any level. The DCs of most skill checks and the rewards (or losses) at the encounter's conclusion should correspond to the party's level.

Mihajla relocates frequently, parking his extradimensional tent in any spot where he expects to find competition. The tent can appear in any locale, from a large city to a remote wilderness to a distant plane. He prefers to set up near crossroads and along well-traveled thoroughfares, because travelers are his favored opponents.

Though he is not malevolent and almost never leaves his tent, Mihajla is seldom welcomed where he appears. If he sets up in a rural area, the simple country folk tend to fear anything unusual. If he sets up near a city, civic leaders cast a dim eye on the gamblers, rough-and-tumble adventurers, and desperate fortune-seekers who are drawn to his tent. For this reason, Mihajla never stays anywhere longer than a week.

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Synopsis

"Mihajla's Tent" is a single encounter with an emphasis on social interaction with Mihajla. Though some characters might try to elicit a reward from the nearby locals who want the djinn expelled, that reward is likely a paltry sum in comparison to the rewards to be gained in games played against the djinn.

A game can be just about anything that can be gambled on. In some cases, the character might be able to choose the game, but the djinn initially insists on doing this himself.

Mihajla does not want physical harm to come to any of his visitors or the locals around his tent. All he wants to do is win unusual magic items, gold, gems, rarities, and oddities from every plane of existence for his collection.

Characters who match dice or wits with Mihajla can gain rewards based on their level. The stakes need not be money, or even anything physical. The djinn will gamble for nearly anything: *residuum*, knowledge, years of life, even experience points.

Mihajla boasts that he is undefeated, but that's certainly not true; it is, however, the only untruth he will tell. He is not vengeful, and he is a good sport if fairly bested.

All the same, Mihajla competes to win. He is an aggressive and serious player. Like most djinn, he actually enjoys taking advantage of vague statements and loopholes in agreements. To Mihajla, that's just another aspect of the game.

Character Hooks

This adventure is easy to insert into any campaign. It can be used as a side quest or as the beginning of a larger scenario. Because there is no specification of where the djinn's tent has to be set, anywhere that is on land and has fairly regular foot traffic can work. Use one of the following adventure hooks to place player characters into this adventure.

Citizens' Committee: When characters arrive in a town, they immediately hear the locals complaining bitterly about a djinn that appeared nearby a few days ago. The djinn has gambled with many locals since his arrival, for whatever they can put up as stakes. Some villagers have lost everything, from family heirlooms, to furniture, to livestock. One desperate gambler even wagered and lost his children. The villagers are working up their courage to storm the djinn's tent and demand the return of their property—a plan that is certain to end in disaster.

A Noble Plea: A nobleman recently lost a family heirloom, a magic item that has been passed down in his family for generations, in a bet with an ambitious gambling djinn that has taken up residence nearby. The nobleman has posted a sizable reward in exchange for the safe return of the heirloom. The nobleman has also agreed to give the characters a fair amount of coin as collateral for any losses that they might incur upon gambling with the djinn.

Easy Money: Word has reached your ear of a possible fortune to be won. A djinn has come to the area, and he is reputed to be immensely wealthy. It is rumored that he owns one of almost everything, and what he doesn't have, he is eager to gamble for. If characters are looking for specific magic items, the djinn might be a ready source.

Layout of the Tent

When Mihajla travels, he brings his tent along with him.

From the outside, the tent has a simple appearance. It is made of red and blue canvas in a cylindrical shape with a top that comes to a point. Viewed from the outside, the tent is about 10 feet in diameter and the doorway about 5 feet in height.

Upon entering the tent, characters find that it is much more than it seems on the outside. No ceiling is apparent; the walls extend upward until they disappear into what appears to be an endless swirl of dark clouds overhead. A catwalk lined with a fine red velvet rug stretches several hundred feet into a swirling void, ending at a circular platform with a single pedestal in the center. On the edges of the rug are date palms placed every several feet, each one blowing as if touched by wind, but there is no perceptible breeze in the tent. Six large stairways are on either side of the catwalk, three leading off to the right and up and three leading left and down. Each stairway provides access to a separate level of the complex, making the total number of levels seven, counting the entrance level.

Resting on the pedestal at the end of the catwalk is a crystal orb the size of a human head. A swirling conglomeration of clouds and mist is visible within it. Characters who touch the orb barehanded are transported to another level of the complex, determined by a d6 roll. Characters who touch the orb with something protecting their hand experience no effect. The levels are arranged as indicated on the following table.

LEVELS OF MIHAJLA'S TENT

Roll/Level	Accessible by
1	Third (last) staircase on the right
2	Second (middle) staircase on the right
3	First staircase on the right
(0)	Entry area
4	First staircase on the left
5	Second (middle) staircase on the left
6	Last (third) staircase on the left

Level 1

The last staircase on the right leads to the top level of the complex. The highest level is a small clearing about 6 feet in diameter, in a dense thicket of trees, with a floor of grass.

When a character climbs to level 1, read:
The room is walled in by thickets of trees of many variations. In the middle of the room is a golden statue of a minotaur. The statue seems remarkably lifelike for a thing of stone.

The statue is warm to the touch. It is, in fact, alive; it is a minotaur named Kogrion who has been petrified. If characters speak to the statue, it talks back, but it speaks only Jotun, a dialect of Giant spoken primarily by frost giants. Jotun is understandable by characters who speak Giant, but it sounds harsh and clipped. Characters can learn from initial conversation that the minotaur's name is Kogrion, and he was a legendary chieftain among his people. Many years ago, Kogrion wagered his mighty axe Thresholder against immortality, and he won. The tricky djinn, however, gave the minotaur immortality in the form of being turned into a living statue. Kogrion offers his axe in exchange for being restored to flesh and blood. Characters can gamble with Mihajla for the minotaur's freedom. They might also try to use the Remove Affliction ritual (*Player's Handbook*). Because of Mihajla's level, the Heal check that characters must make after using the ritual has a –25 penalty.

Level 2

The second staircase to the right leads to the second upper level of the complex.

When a character climbs to level 2, read:
The second highest level of the complex leads to a walkway 10 feet wide and about 300 feet long. The floor consists of thick, blue carpets laid end to end, with nothing beneath them. The walkway has no walls or ceiling.

The only other features here are twelve doors, six on each side of the walkway, spaced about 50 feet apart. The doors hang without support alongside the carpets. You can see completely around the doors; they appear to lead to nothing.

Each door opens to an extradimensional space that is accessible only through that door. The rooms beyond the doors can be as small or as vast as you care to make them. Suggested contents for the rooms:

- Child captives of the djinn.
- Elderly captives of the djinn.
- Stacks of boxes containing everything and anything, or nothing.
- Cages of exotic or magical beasts.
- Macabre rooms where gravity follows no apparent rules, sound is heard backward, flowers with humanoid faces squall like babies, or imps dressed as royalty pretend to have a dinner party.
- Lush pillows and rugs piled dozens of feet deep.
- An armory containing thousands of nonmagical weapons and suits of armor from all time periods and all planes.
- An endless vista of the night sky filled with swirling planets and stars in strange constellations.

Characters can speak to any captives they find. The elderly captives were once servants, but they have grown too frail to continue working. The children were lost by parents who gambled them and are being trained as servants. All the captives seem healthy, say they are well cared for, and have no particular complaints against Mihajla. Even so, some of them would like to see the outside world and their families again, especially the children. Like everything else, Mihajla will use them as stakes in a game but won't relinquish them for any other reason.

Level 3

The first staircase on the right leads up a short distance to level 3 of the tent. From below, the characters can see that level 3 is a simple, circular, stone platform of tremendous diameter. The platform extends far into the distance to the right, not directly overhead.

When a character climbs to level 3, read:
The first level above the entrance is a simple, circular, stone platform, but it must be at least a half-mile in diameter. Though it appeared solid from below, most of the platform is actually a lake. You see fish darting through beds of kelp in the clear, cool water. An immense ship of exotic design has sunk in the lake and now rests on its side on the bottom. Every so often, you glimpse the glint of gold through cracks in the vessel's hull.

This is where Mihajla keeps his winnings of money. Characters can enter the pool, swim in it, and explore it, but if anyone takes even a single coin from the treasure, that character is instantly transported back to level 0, just inside the tent's entrance, and the gold coin has transformed to a small, pinching crab in his hand.

You can add a school of mermaids or other aquatic creatures to the pool, if the characters seem inclined to spend time here. This level could become an entire desert oasis with a thriving ecosystem. If you include dangerous creatures, they should be easily avoided. Mihajla doesn't want his guests to be hurt; he wants them to be impressed.

Level 4

The first staircase to the left leads to the first level of the complex beneath the entrance.

When a character climbs down to level 4, read:
The first level below the entrance is an extensive hedge maze. The hedges are 12 feet tall, 3 feet thick, and far too dense to push through. The lighting here is a uniform, filtered gray, like a heavily overcast day. The ground beneath your feet is moss-covered soil. Above your head, barely a foot above the top of the hedge walls, is a mossy ceiling that appears identical to the ground.

Gamblers who wager against the djinn for great adventure or something to stimulate their minds might find themselves trapped in the maze. Characters who wander in the maze can meet any number of nonplayer characters, some of whom might have been here for a long time after losing bets against the djinn. They have lost all sense of time in the hedge's eternal dusk. Two sample characters who can be met here are Keldar Telrandian, a mage who gambled with the djinn for a puzzle that would provide him with a true challenge, and Set'zar the Barren, a hunter who gambled for a chance to hunt on terrain that would fully test his skill as a tracker and trailblazer. Both Telrandian and Set'zar offer to reward the characters richly in exchange for their help in escaping from the maze.

The maze traps only those who are cast into it by Mihajla. If the characters wander in on their own, they never feel lost or disoriented in it, and they can find their way back out with ease.

Nonplayer characters who are helped out of the maze might ask to accompany the characters when they go to face Mihajla. Such individuals might be planning to attack the djinn for revenge, hoping that they can drag the heroes into the fight. This situation can create an opportunity to demonstrate Mihajla's power before characters are tempted to attack him themselves.

Level 5

The second staircase on the left leads two levels down.

When a character climbs down to level 5, read:
The second lowest level of the complex is a rounded platform carpeted with layers of plush rugs piled with cushions and pillows, reclining couches and divans. Trays of food and pitchers of wine are lined up on low, beautifully carved tables of richly stained wood. Milling about the area are women and men in exotic outfits, cleaning, straightening, fluffing pillows, and polishing the furniture.

Characters who speak to the people here will learn that they are servants to the djinn. This area is provided for the comfort of his visitors. Characters are free to relax, dine, and drink here, but if they partake of Mihajla's hospitality, they will also be expected to gamble with him.

If anyone asks whether these servants are free to leave, the question puzzles them. They don't consider themselves slaves, and they seem to have no desire to leave. In fact, they seem to have no ambition of any kind except to tend to the comfort of Mihajla and his guests.

Level 6

The last staircase on the left leads to the bottom level of the complex.

When a character climbs down to level 6, read:
You have entered a large, elegant, high-ceilinged room made of white marble. It is an art gallery; paintings hang on every wall. They represent every imaginable style, including some you've never seen before. You see broad landscapes, brilliantly hued sunsets, and idyllic views of picnics and festivals, but also grotesque creatures, scenes of mourning, and hellish panoramas. Drawing near, you can actually hear sounds from the paintings–faint whisperings, the sighing of wind, the gurgling of a brook, or the screams of the tormented.

The paintings are the trapped souls of gamblers who wagered more than they could pay. Mihajla keeps them here until he deems that they have worked off their debt by serving in his gallery. If characters watch a painting closely for several minutes, they might actually detect that the scene has shifted slightly; a dancer has shifted onto the opposite foot, a shieldmaiden has brought her galloping horse to a canter. Only the djinn can release captives from the paintings.

The Lair of Mihajla

To reach the room where Mihajla waits, a character needs to pick up the orb from the pedestal without touching it with his or her skin. Once the orb has been moved, the complex rumbles and seems to shift out of focus momentarily. As their vision returns to normal, the characters see that all the stairways have disappeared and only a single ornate door remains at the end of the hall where the entrance was before. The words "The Home of Mihajla the Magnificent" in Primordial are inlaid in gold above the doorway.

Beyond that door, a marble catwalk stretches to a semicircular platform. At the center of the platform is an elaborate throne, and sitting on the throne is the massive, imposing form of Mihajla. All around the platform are displayed many of the magic items that Mihajla has won through his gambling. Below the catwalk and the platform are endless clouds, swirling hypnotically.

The Djinn's Defenses

Mihajla is an entrepreneur, and he considers himself above such activities as fighting with mortals. That doesn't mean he won't defend himself if attacked. He is powerful enough that he has little to fear from most people who come to see him. His usual tactic is to knock attackers unconscious. When they awaken—in chains—Mihajla offers to gamble with them for their freedom. They have little to wager with at that point, because the djinn has already taken away their belongings. He considers that fair, because they attacked him. Characters will need to bet with information, service, or wealth that is stored somewhere else if they have no other means of escape.

If Mihajla ever senses that he is truly in danger from attackers, he will simply cast a spell to transport his tent to a distant locale, leaving characters in the vacant field where they initially found the tent.

Mihajla the Djinn **Level 25 Controller (Leader)**
Large elemental humanoid (air) **XP 7,000**

HP 236; **Bloodied** 118 **Initiative** +17
AC 39, **Fortitude** 38, **Reflex** 36, **Will** 36 **Perception** +23
Immune disease, poison; **Resist** 15 thunder Blindsight 10
Speed 6, fly 8 (hover)

Standard Actions

Storm Staff (weapon) ✦ **At-Will**
Attack: Melee 2 (one creature); +30 vs. AC
Hit: 4d10 + 11 damage, and Mihajla either shifts up to 2 squares or makes an extra recharge roll for *storm shout*.

Mystic Hail (psychic) ✦ **At-Will**
Attack: Ranged 20 (one creature); +28 vs. Will
Hit: 4d10 + 11 psychic damage, and the target grants combat advantage to Mihajla (save ends).

Sandstorm (psychic, zone) ✦ **Encounter**
Attack: Close burst 3 (enemies in the burst); +28 vs. Will
Hit: 3d10 + 11 psychic damage.
Effect: The burst creates a zone that lasts until the end of Mihajla's next turn. Each ally in the zone gains partial concealment. Each enemy that ends its turn in the zone is dazed until the end of its next turn.
Sustain Minor: The zone persists until the end of Mihajla's next turn.

Storm Shout (thunder) ✦ **Recharge** ⚄ ⁞⁞

Attack: Close blast 5 (creatures in the blast); +28 vs. Will
Hit: 4d10 + 6 thunder damage, and Mihajla pushes the target up to 3 squares and knocks it prone.

Minor Actions

Elemental Command ✦ **At-Will** (1/round)
Effect: Mihajla slides one creature within 10 squares 1 square.

Skills Diplomacy +24, Insight +23, Bluff +24
Str 26 (+20) **Dex** 20 (+17) **Wis** 22 (+18)
Con 28 (+21) **Int** 25 (+19) **Cha** 25 (+19)
Alignment unaligned **Languages** Common, Primordial
Equipment quarterstaff

The Games

For examples of the types of contests Mihajla prefers, see "Gambler's Games" in *Dragon* 398. The djinn favors games of chance over games of skill. He never gives anything away for free. If characters want something from Mihajla, they must gamble for it.

Characters can wager anything with the djinn. Mihajla will gamble for gold, gems, magic items, servitude, travel, favors, introductions to powerful extraplanar beings, even experience points (at your discretion, of course). His ever-present concern is that the stakes must be equitable; all competing characters must face equal risk.

Any attempts by characters to cheat, bluff, or deceive Mihajla use DCs of the djinn's level (25). Anyone caught cheating risks being imprisoned in one of the djinn's paintings, being cast into the maze, awakening with no desire to do anything but serve Mihajla, or becoming caught in any of his other devious traps.

Assuming that all interactions are amicable, all debts are paid promptly, and Mihajla is satisfied with the transactions, characters are free to leave anytime. Mihajla will remain in this place for several more days, so that characters who lost to the djinn have a chance to come back and try their luck again. If he takes a liking to the characters, he might even tell them where their paths might cross in the future.

About the Author

Cameron Burry has been a Dungeons & Dragons enthusiast since 2000, when he fell in love with the mythology of R.A. Salvatore's novel *The Crystal Shard*. He is a professional author who has been published in various gaming websites as well as online magazines around the world. He has a bachelor's degree in creative writing from Murray State University and lives in Kansas City, Missouri.

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April Adventure Hooks

Doing Your Groundwork

Every adventure begins with a subtle or not-so-subtle hook—that carrot or stick which motivates the characters to risk their lives for gold, glory, or the greater good. Some hooks are instantaneous and unavoidable. When a dragon drops from the sky into a screaming dive straight toward you, the adventure is on whether you like it or not. Most adventures, though, benefit from having some groundwork laid before the main structure gets built. Clues need to be sprinkled in the characters' paths, rumors whispered in their ears, unsigned notes left in their saddlebags, or magic relics of unknown origin discovered in a forgotten tomb or delivered to their rooms in the dead of night. These types of hooks are most effective when players have time to wonder about them for a few game sessions before their meaning becomes clear.

That's the purpose of this article. It presents the hooks and rumors you can sprinkle around the inn weeks before launching characters into an adventure. If you inadvertently insert a few leads into the game which never pan out, you've still made the world feel like a bigger place than your dining room table.

Scarblade

"Scarblade" is an adventure for characters of 7th to 9th level. It takes place in the Chaos Scar or in any densely forested area in your campaign setting.

In "Scarblade," characters discover a gladiatorial pit that is associated with an enticing magical artifact known as the Scarblade. The Proving Pit and the Scarblade are both self-aware to a limited extent. Though they share a location and methodology, they want separate things. Fantastic tales or psychic lures draw a group of adventurers to the brutal Proving Pit. There they must battle local denizens and the pit's champion, the ghost of Morrn Bladeclaw. If victorious, the adventurers come away with the Scarblade, a powerful artifact.

Getting the Characters Involved

At some point during one of their explorations into the Chaos Scar, or while discussing the lore of the Chaos Scar at Restwell Keep or at the Crossroads trading post, the adventurers learn of the dreaded and violent Proving Pit. It should be a fairly well known legend, although concrete, reliable information will be hard to come by.

Select one or more of the following adventure hooks and adapt it to your campaign.

- The adventurers hear local tales of the Scarblade from bards, discover the long-lost diary of a dead adventurer, or stumble onto the information through their own research or scrying. Provide them with a general description of the sword and the Proving Pit. The source might also relate some of Morrn Bladeclaw's history.
- The Scarblade wants to escape from the pit, and it sometimes calls out psychically to an adventurer it feels is capable of freeing it and wielding it, even if only temporarily.
- The Proving Pit itself psychically calls to one or more of the most powerful player characters with promises of power and glory for those who are victorious. Characters might experience visions of themselves defeating their companions,

or using the mighty Scarblade to defeat their longtime foes.
- The adventurers enter the valley of the proving pit, either intentionally or because it happens to be in their path, and find it difficult to escape. Once there, they encounter the Scarblade.
- The adventurers become embroiled in a dispute with a local inhabitant who demands that they go to the Proving Pit to resolve the situation. This nonplayer character will almost certainly withhold some details about the pit, or will himself be misinformed about its real nature.

Rumors

Any of the following elements can be seeded into rumors for the purpose of drawing the characters toward the Proving Pit. Note that not all of this information is accurate.

- Morrn Bladeclaw was a barbarian warrior known for his cruelty and ambition. He steadily advanced in status in his clan until he claimed the right to become its champion by defeating the wielder of the powerful artifact known as Scarblade. One of Bladeclaw's tribal enemies eventually killed him but was unable to wrest Scarblade from the dead man's hands. Now the corpse of Morrn Bladeclaw fights anyone who will face him, with Scarblade as the prize for the victor.
- The Proving Pit is used by the denizens of the Chaos Scar to settle disputes between themselves or to test themselves against other fighters of many races and species. A splinter of the meteorite that created the Chaos Scar lies hundreds of feet below the surface of the pit, giving the pit itself a malevolent cunning. No one who enters the pit has ever managed to leave it; either they die facing Morrn Bladeclaw, or they kill him, take Scarblade, and instantly assume Bladeclaw's curse. In fact, dozens of warriors have possessed the blade over the years, but none have carried it out of the Proving Pit.
- Morrn Bladeclaw came to the Proving Pit intending to win Scarblade, and he did. Now, the blade makes him invincible and immortal. He could leave anytime he wanted to, but he enjoys the killing too much.
- After capturing Scarblade from a frost giant, Morrn was assassinated by a wizard of great power who sought the mighty artifact. With his final breath, Morrn Bladeclaw cursed the wizard to forever fight anyone who came to claim the blade.
- The Scarblade is encased in a translucent crystal spire above a gladiatorial pit. Anyone who defeats the pit's champion can claim it.

Killing Ground

"Killing Ground" is an adventure for characters of 11th to 13th level.

Sinister forces have seized a secluded forest demesne in the Feywild. Reflecting the brutal will of those forces, the wilderness warped into a sentient shifting maze. Its relentless, crawling expansion is fueled by an insatiable hunger for prey. Enchanting song drifts from the maze's shadowed ways, luring all who hear it to their doom. The heroes soon find themselves trapped and hunted for sport in the maze's twisting paths.

Background

Ancient conduits of arcane power cover the natural world and the Feywild like an eldritch web. Civilizations feel compelled to build along these ley lines, often erecting their most sacred sites where the subtle paths intersect to form magical fonts of unfathomable strength. In the Feywild, these intersections create fey demesnes, places where the very environment attunes itself to the strongest denizen's disposition.

One such demesne exists in the heart of a lush, lonely wood, tucked away from the ageless eyes of the eladrin and the endless ambitions of the fomorian tyrants. Three great cities built by three different civilizations rose and fell here during the past millennia. Eventually, a firbolg clan came to the ruins in search of wild game. The demesne transformed to suit the needs of the Master of the Wild Hunt. Vegetation swallowed the forgotten ruins, wildlife bred in abundance, and many seasons passed in relative harmony.

Months ago, the demesne experienced its first worldfall in centuries. While the forest overlapped the mortal realm, minotaur initiates of the abominable Blood League discovered it. Craving the beating hearts of woodland fey, the minotaurs rode worldfall back to the Feywild and rampaged through the region. While stalking a dusk unicorn, they stumbled upon a towering gemstone monolith at the intersection of the demesne's ley lines. The cabalists ritually

slaughtered the unicorn at the base of the spire. At the height of the sacrifice, fey maidens appeared in a swell of haunting song—manifestations of the demesne's newly born hunger. In response to their enchanting melody, the ruin-speckled wilderness warped into a vast, living maze.

Now firbolg survivors are trapped in their own territory, where they are hunted by the minotaurs. Worldfall is common, allowing the deadly maze to threaten both the Feywild and the mortal realm. Through day and night, siren song lures countless creatures to their deaths within the Blood League's killing ground.

Getting the Characters Involved

Worldfall brings the killing ground to the mortal realm from dusk until dawn. Heroes in the mortal world who are at the proper location can witness a spectacular union of the planes when the sun's rays fade. They might also encounter the maze while in the Feywild, or they may hear of it in the mortal realm and cast a ritual to reach the demesne from either plane.

- Rumor spreads of nightly worldfall in the wilderness several days outside of town. A faint but beguiling song drifts from deep within the forest. It grows louder and more enchanting each night, but none who search for the enticing song ever return. The longer the heroes remain in town, the more they hear villagers and farmland refugees lamenting the loss of loved ones who followed the lilting voices into the forest.
- While resting one evening in or near a forest, the heroes hear the distant echo of singing maidens. The song returns each night, no matter where they characters are, as long as they stay in the same general area. Eventually, the heroes camp in a spot where they witness the bizarre sight of a worldfall. They see paths winding into crumbling ruins that are blanketed with thick vegetation. The singing originates from within.

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